

THE RELIGIOUS THOUGHT OF

LEON BLOY
(1846-1917)

By

ALEXANDER MAY

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CONTENTS

PART I. INTRODUCTION	PAGE.
CHAPTER 1. THE INTRODUCTION	1.
2. LEON BLOY'S BACKGROUND	11.
PART II. LANDMARKS IN BLOY'S THOUGHT	
CHAPTER 2. THE	57.
3. THE	69.
4. THE	82.
5. THE	107.
6. THE	128.
APPENDIX TO CHAPTER 5.	
CHAPTER 6. TRANSLATION OF THE DELIVERANCE	154.
CHAPTER 6. DEDICATED TO	174.
MY WIFE AND MY MOTHER	
PART III. BLOY'S PROSE AND POETRY	
CHAPTER 7. THE IRREVERSIBLE	191.
8. THE	219.
9. THE PROBLEM OF THE ABSOLUTE	
(A) Spiritual Commerce	252.
10. THE PROBLEM OF THE ABSOLUTE	
(B) The Jews	274.
11. THE PROBLEM OF THE HOLY SEPULCHRE	304.
Appendix to the whole work.	
Translation of	
LE SAUVET PAR LES JUSTES	1 - 91.
APPENDIX (at end of Work)	1. - viii.

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C O N T E N T S .

<u>PART I.</u>	<u>INTRODUCTORY</u>	<u>PAGE.</u>
CHAPTER 1.	<u>INTRODUCTION.</u>	1.
" 2.	<u>BLOY'S CULTURAL BACKGROUND.</u>	11.
<u>PART II.</u>	<u>LANDMARKS IN BLOY'S PILGRIMAGE</u>	
CHAPTER 1.	<u>YOUTH.</u>	37.
" 2.	<u>CONVERSION .</u>	59.
" 3.	<u>DESPAIR .</u>	82.
" 4.	<u>VERONIQUE .</u>	107.
" 5.	<u>LA SALETTE ,</u>	128.
Appendix to Chapter 5.	Translation of <u>THE DELIVERANCE</u> .	154.
CHAPTER 6.	<u>MARRIAGE .</u>	174.
<u>PART III.</u>	<u>BLOY'S MESSAGE FOR TO-DAY</u>	
CHAPTER 1.	<u>THE IRREVOCABLE .</u>	191.
" 2.	<u>THE ABSOLUTE .</u>	219.
" 3.	<u>THE ECONOMY OF THE ABSOLUTE .</u>	
	(A) <u>Spiritual Commerce .</u>	250.
" 4.	<u>THE ECONOMY OF THE ABSOLUTE .</u>	
	(B) <u>The Jews .</u>	274.
" 5.	<u>THE PILGRIM OF THE HOLY SEPULCHRE .</u>	304.
Appendix to the whole work.	Translation of <u>LE SALUT PAR LES JUIFS</u>	1 - 91.
<u>BIBLIOGRAPHY</u>	(At end of Work)	i. - viii.

CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION

In order to give Léon Bloy his rightful place among his religious peers a certain literary setting is required, so that his true greatness may become apparent in the light of comparisons with other thinkers who have contributed to the religious life of mankind. To this end the bibliography had to be extended to make room for writers who do not have an obvious bearing on the specific study of Bloy. One cannot help remarking that if this spacious treatment had been meted out to him by certain writers, we might have been spared the unfortunate result of regarding Bloy as an ill-natured and unbalanced Catholic, who can therefore be lightly dismissed. The method of understanding the French author here employed, however, is a good deal more laborious than the rather light introduction he has so far been offered to the English-speaking public. We are not, of course, thinking now of Edith Riley's translation of Béguin's Léon Bloy, l'Impatient, nor of Pfleger's chapter on Bloy in his Wrestlers with Christ, both of which are admirable. But Halévy's reference to Bloy as "an eccentric believer given to much violence and abuse", (1) gives a completely misleading impression of the man, and is fair neither to the author of the famous diaries nor to one who obviously has an intimate sympathy with Charles Péguy. For it must be remembered that the poet's spiritual kinship with Bloy is not to be despised. Then again, Heppenstall's handling of Bloy's novels

(1) See Péguy and les Cahiers de la Quinzaine p.174

is much too superficial for students who are earnestly desirous of understanding his religious stature.(1) Far more painstaking patience is required in absorbing the religious thinker's great message, and even more humility in attempting to impart that message to others.

The present study of The Religious Thought of Léon Bloy is divided into three parts. The first chapter of Part I is taken up with outlining the scheme of work and ^{Sk}martialling of material. It also tries to investigate Bloy's claim as a modern prophet. The second chapter of this part seeks to draw a picture of the life and times of our author, and to show how he adapted himself to his contemporary society.

Part II Landmarks in Bloy's Pilgrimage, does not set itself out to be even a rough biography of Bloy. A mere casual reader of the author's books cannot fail to realise how closely life and thought are knit together in this remarkable man. The dynamic personality of Jean Bloy's turbulent and refractory son comes out in all his works. An attempt is made, therefore, to bring out this interplay of life and thought by seizing on a few phases of Bloy's life which seem to us to be rather more important than others, and using them to show how they developed his thought and religious experience. Though the last chapter of Part II only takes us as far as Bloy's marriage with Jeanne Molbeck, this in no way interferes with our writer's prerogative

(1) See The Double Image first few chapters.

of ranging over the whole territory of Bloy's thought, right up to its closing stages. In this way we are often helped to catch a synoptic view of his later developments both in living and thinking.

The fifth chapter of Part II, La Salette, is followed immediately with a translation of The Deliverance which is reputed to have been given by the Virgin to the peasant children Mélanie Calvat and Maximin Giraud, as it was written by the former (the more spiritually minded of the two) and recorded in Celle qui Pleure. This appendix falls into its proper place, for it is altogether essential to have some knowledge of the Apparition of the Holy Virgin on La Salette and the substance of her alleged message, before we can understand the reaction of Bloy and those other fellow-Catholics who believed so implicitly in the warnings of Celle qui Pleure.

In the last part of the work, we endeavour to get to grips with the fundamental, all-encompassing thought which dominates Bloy's whole being with compelling power, bringing all his faculties of body, mind and spirit into subjection to it. We have deemed it fitting to name Part III Bloy's Message for To-day. For, if Karl Barth's Theology of Crisis is a salutary corrective to the liberal Christianity which tends to absorb uncritically the benefits of scientific humanism without exposing them to the Judgment of God, Léon Bloy's Religion of the Absolute is an even more salutary corrective

to the secularised mentality of the bourgeois whose soul has been emasculated by an atmosphere denuded of the transcendent sovereignty of Almighty God. This dimension of the Eternal, the true home of the soul, has been displayed again in all its august severity and beauty, in the life and work of a prophet who wrote books so that posterity might live. This he persisted in doing with the doggedness of a divine Hope which continued to support him, though he might have died for all the material good any of his books did him. His compositions were designed to "strike like a mighty lightning-flash minds emancipated from the gospel of sport and machinery." These words, comments Pfleger:

"express not the resentment of a wounded vanity, but a calm knowledge of spiritual laws. Spiritual meteors with a core of flame such as Bloy possessed, do not penetrate the atmosphere of our planet without setting it on fire, sooner or later. Nor are they extinguished so quickly as corporeal meteors. For they come from the depths not of space, but of spirit, of the Absolute."(1)

An effort has been made, then, in Part III to examine this meteor, wrought in the arsenal of Bloy's despair, in the hope that it may yet again exercise its dynamic power in a world which may otherwise perish by a missile, wrought too, in the arsenal of man's despair. May the dynamic of the spirit prevail over the dynamic of matter: and may Bloy, being dead, yet speak the life-giving word!

As an Appendix to the entire work, it has been thought advisable to add a complete translation of Le Salut par les Juifs.

(1) Wrestlers with Christ p.34

Although this is admittedly his most difficult book, it is nevertheless the book which contains in summary form the key to all the rest of his work. Small extracts from Le Salut have already appeared in English. They are to be found, for example, in Léon Bloy: the Pauper-Prophet, Léon Bloy: A Study in Impatience, Léon Bloy: Pilgrim of the Absolute and We have been Friends together. The selections chosen, however, have been nearly all typical passages, repeated in the translations. In the first instance, the present writer did not consult any of the above-mentioned books in his translation. He thought it better, for the sake of style &c., to thresh out the translation in its entirety in his own way. Thereafter, of course, he checked it up with other partial translations, and made any modifications and improvements according as was esteemed necessary. Le Salut, then, is given as an addendum to the main thesis, but it must not on that account be regarded as a superfluity. It is the fons et origo of Bloy's Biblical Philosophy of History, and when read and pondered, will cast a flood of light on parts of the study which might otherwise be harder to grasp.

In view of the fact that very few of Bloy's books have been translated into English, it has been reckoned not inadvisable to give rather more specimens of his work than would have been thought necessary if we had been dealing with an English author. Coupled with this, there is the sheer joy of quoting from a

master who can write. It is to be hoped that the pleasure of hearing Bloy speak for himself will not only reveal to the reader more of his spiritual calibre, but will also compensate in some measure for the number of pages in the present study.

Now, as to the bibliography; it must be understood that it is by no means an exhaustive one on the subject. Fuller bibliographies on Léon Bloy appear at the end of Bloy: Mystique de la Douleur and Portrait of Léon Bloy. Perhaps the fullest one is given with Léon Bloy in the Résurrection series. Only the material which has been actually consulted is recorded at the back of this work. At the initial stages of this study, indeed, considerable difficulty was encountered in discovering even the vestiges of a Bloyan bibliography in this country. As time went on, however, the difficulties gradually eased, and to-day the National Library of Scotland is acquiring a constantly increasing number of volumes in the Oeuvres Complètes de Léon Bloy.

The best introduction to Léon Bloy which has so far appeared in English is undoubtedly the chapter in E.I. Watkin's translation of Karl Pflieger's Geister die um Christus ringen (Wrestlers with Christ), and that appeared as early as 1935. Others which have made their appearance since then have been more popular in character, apart from E. Riley's translation of Béguin's Léon Bloy l'Impatient (Léon Bloy: A Study in Impatience).

In this last-mentioned book the French professor makes a more earnest attempt to grapple with the fundamental thought of the religious metaphysician.

As to the foot-notes; attention must be drawn to a variety of methods used in quoting from Bloy in the ensuing pages. When no English translation has been made of his books, the translation given is the present writer's own, and the reference is from the French book. On many other occasions two references are given, firstly from the French book, and secondly, from the translation that is being used. It should be noted, too, that before the present writer was introduced to Bloy's Oeuvres Complètes, he had access to other works in the French, some borrowed from various libraries, and others imported from the Continent. In order, therefore, to save confusion, when any reference is given, the edition recorded in the bibliography is meant unless O.C. is specifically marked. In that case the writer is referring to the Oeuvres Complètes. Sometimes, indeed, quotations are made from the identical work of Bloy but in different editions. Care has been exercised, however, to mark O.C. whenever the book referred to is not the edition mentioned in the bibliography.

It surely is a singular coincidence that a similar measure of posthumous appreciation and understanding is being accorded to the works of that noted thinker and theologian P. T. Forsyth as is being accorded to the works of Léon Bloy. The more

important works of the former are being re-issued in a new edition at the same time as the Œuvres Complètes of the latter are being assembled. Of both these writers it may be truly said: they were Christian metaphysicians, the nature and value of whose works it has taken several decades to absorb and appreciate. Though the credal differences of the Protestant and the Catholic are many and varied, in view of their respective upbringings and traditions, these are swallowed up in their deep devotion and love for their common Master. From our knowledge of the two thinkers, the comments made recently by the principal of an English theological college on Forsyth may quite as truthfully have been spoken on Bloy:

"Forsyth," says professor Cunliffe Jones, "didn't take a narrow view of what the Gospel meant. He didn't limit it to our present problems or to any local setting. He saw the Gospel on the scale of all history and of all mankind. The Gospel, for him, was not God's word of grace to those few people who happen to believe in Christ, but God's action of Grace for all mankind. In Christ God has dealt and deals with man - all men, everywhere and for all time. In Christ the thing that has troubled and disturbed human history, which can be seen at work in any period of human history whenever we look beyond the surface, is fully overcome. And man cannot be truly human unless he comes to realise that both the goal of his life and the power to reach it are found in Christ."(1)

That passage, mutatis mutandis, might equally well apply to the experiential thinking of the French Catholic. For a trained theologian like "P.T.", the comment is not altogether surprising: the remarkable thing (salted with sublime irony) is that a layman like Bloy finds himself in the same category

(1) See article Modern Prophet by H. Cunliffe Jones, Principal of Yorkshire United College in British Weekly Feb.15. 1951

with an academic professor!

Now, the question is sometimes asked: in what sense is Léon Bloy a prophet? We remember that he tells us in

Le Salut par les Juifs:

"I am sorry I cannot put myself forward to my ambitious contemporaries as an authentic revealer. The minding of mysteries is not my concern, and the custody of Future Events has certainly not come my way. Besides, prophets now-a-days are so completely lacking in miracles that it appears impossible to discern who they are."(1)

At the same time Bloy would be considered a prophet in Dr Orr's sense, when he says:

"The idea becomes the main thing, the particular form of the idea - the clothing of imagery or detail it receives is less essential...In the prediction of distant events to which existing conditions no longer apply, there is no alternative but that these should be presented in the form of the present. This is a principle which runs right through all prophecy where the future state of the Kingdom of God is concerned. It would serve no end, and is, under ordinary conditions, psychologically inconceivable that the prophet should be lifted out of all the forms of his existing consciousness, and transported into conditions utterly strange and inapprehensible by him. Such a revelation would, in any case, have been incommunicable to others. We have, in the earthly condition, the same difficulty in picturing to ourselves the conditions of a heavenly state. But just as supersensible realities cannot be conceived or spoken of by us except under forms of symbol or figure drawn from earthly relations, so prophecy of the future, or of a better dispensation, must necessarily picture that future, or those new conditions, in forms drawn from the present."(2)

In the light of that passage Bloy is a prophet in the tradition of Elijah, Isaiah and Jeremiah; and in particular his symbolism of suffering and money (spiritual commerce)(3)

(1) Tr. in Appendix p.28

(2) The Problem of the Old Testament p.461

(3) See especially Part III Ch.3 of this work (inter alia).

require to be deeply absorbed to-day in an age when the things we see and handle are far too much with us.

This introductory word would be incomplete if a working minister of the Gospel did not express his sense of gratitude to Principal John Baillie for introducing him to the spiritual adventure of exploring Léon Bloy. Both the principal and Professor Tindal have accorded the explorer never-failing courtesy and kindness in the prosecution of his studies, and he is deeply appreciative of all their friendly counsel and interest.

Perhaps it would be invidious to make discriminations as to the help received from the bibliography, in view of the number of writers consulted. Nevertheless, one exception must be made. The French commentator Marcel Moré has done more to open the eyes of the present writer to the real greatness of Léon Bloy than any other single writer.

La Muraille de l'Irrévocable is by far the most important contribution to the book Léon Bloy in the Résurrection series published by Didier in 1946, and it is only common charity to express one's indebtedness to that article for the chapter on Despair in Part II and the chapter on The Irrevocable in Part III.

CHAPTER 2. BLOY'S CULTURAL BACKGROUND.

The task of assessing the religious stature of Léon Bloy, now that he has been laid to rest these thirty years and more, is at last becoming considerably less difficult than it was in former years. It is true that the noise of battle raised over his literary and religious genius still breaks out periodically. But the dust of the struggle between the Bloyards and the anti-Bloyards has subsided sufficiently to allow a student to make up his mind on the merits of the controversy.

Perhaps as good a way as any of taking the measure of an authour is to see him against the cultural background of his age. For, if genius cannot be explained by that background, it is certainly not independent of it. The beauty of the tulip may not depend on the chemical structure of the soil in which it is reared nearly so much as on the innate quality of the bulb. Nevertheless, without that soil there would be no flowering. A critical survey, therefore, of the cultural milieu of Bloy's life will go far towards helping us to understand the peculiar greatness of such an unusual growth. 'Cultural' is used here in the ordinary sense of the literary, political and religious influences which moulded the life and character of the French writer.

The nineteenth century had scarcely passed its first quarter when something approaching a wholesale revolution overtook the language and style of French literature. It will be remembered that after the free and somewhat indiscriminate blossoming of

Renaissance thought, the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries witnessed a process of restriction to certain forms which paid attention to purely arbitrary rules. This had a cramping effect on the literature of the period. However, in the third decade of the nineteenth century the Romantic movement swept over France. Classical literary forms were broken up or discarded. Strength, suppleness and variety were introduced into the language, and literary forms of a wholly novel character took the place of the rigid ones which had been abandoned. As our well-known English poet, Herbert Palmer says, when discussing a similar movement in English literature, "The old stage-coach of the Muses had got overcrowded with mannered and artificial baggage, and the Romantics came along to throw it all off." A remarkable invigoration stimulated the belles lettres. Poetry was revived; prose romance and literary criticism were brought to a perfection previously unknown; and history produced works more various than any previous stage of the language. Without exaggeration it might be said that later nineteenth century French, though it might have lacked some of the precision and even elegance of the Classical period, became a much more suitable instrument for the expression of the new modes of experimental thinking which were beginning to arouse the world, just at that time. For this was the century which was to produce men of the calibre of Auguste Comte, the sociologist, Taine, the philosopher and historian, Lammennais, the religious

thinker whose political ideas in the end estranged him from the Vatican, Renan, the liberal critic and powerful disseminator of religious scepticism, Baudelaire, the poet who fell foul of the police by reason of his 'immoral' verses, and Lamertine, Flaubert, the Goncourts, Hugo, Dumas, Balzac, Georges Sand and many more. Each and all of these literati bespeak something entirely new in the field of French thought and letters.

Though Léon Bloy flourished at a later period than the hey-day of the Romantic movement, there can be little doubt that in many respects he was the child of its spirit.

Romanticism was the very instrument needed to fashion the French language and give it that subtle lucidity of texture, untrammelled by the stiffness of Classical rules, which constituted a ready-made medium for the expression of Bloy's religious genius. Perhaps Baudelaire, more than any other man of letters, showed greatest affinity with one side of Bloy's literary temperament. René Martineau goes so far as to say that Bloy was the "Catholic fulfilment of Baudelaire." (1) In a later chapter we shall study this kinship in greater detail. (2)

The later Romantic movement gave rise to a school of poets known, half seriously and half in derision as the Parnassians, among whom was Baudelaire himself and François Coppée, at whose house Bloy had the good fortune to meet Jeanne Molbeck, the daughter of a Danish poet, who was shortly after to become his

(1) Résurrection: Léon Bloy p.27

(2) See Part III Ch.I p.

wife. If Léon Bloy was indebted to Romanticism for the literary form in which to cast his religious thought, there is no doubt at all that he owed nothing to its liberal philosophy and the pantheism and scepticism with which it was imbued. Such a philosophy was anathema to Marchenoir(1) the man of the Absolute.

In the latter half of the nineteenth century the mood of Romanticism gave way to the Realistic movement, which in its turn prepared the way for the full-blooded Naturalistic school. The name of Gustave Flaubert overshadows all other writers during the middle part of the century. A ceaseless and meticulous worker, taking many years to complete a book, his first literary effort, Madame Bovary created a tremendous sensation in France when it appeared in 1857. This novel was scarcely understood at first, as it was something entirely new in the sphere of literature, being nothing less than the scrupulously exact and truthful portraiture of life. It was little wonder that its advent created a scandal and that the author had to stand his trial on a charge of "immorality". Such a douche of "realism" after the geniality of the Romantic revival was rather too much for the French public. Yet in time it was this aspect of his genius which was accepted and which exercised an extraordinary influence over writers like the Goncourts, Daudet and Zola. After Madame Bovary, therefore, Realism became a practical possibility in French literature, though none of

(1) The hero of Le Désespéré and the prototype of the author.

the professing "realists" who followed were to grasp reality so firmly and present it so exactly, so surely or with such subtlety of colour and contour as the author of the notorious Madame (1). Like Robert Louis Stevenson, Flaubert was a purist in style and gained his remarkable perfection with the unceasing sweat of his brow.

The Naturalistic movement proper took its rise from the evolutionary theories which were beginning to gain ground in England after the publication, The Origin of Species in 1859 and also from the positivism of Comte. The scientific humanism of Spenser and Huxley was paralleled in France by the grosser "animalism" of Emile Zola and his disciples. To those devotees of Mother Nature science seemed to indicate that the only trustworthy data were those of the senses: and they seized upon this so-called fact and raised it to the level of a literary dogma. They abandoned convention and instituted a searching and exhaustive enquiry into human nature. Out to discover the human "document", they presented what they termed a "slice of life" without beginning or end, in which they aimed at eliminating the personality of the author altogether. In this way they sought to achieve entire scientific impartiality.

A certain perverted greatness in this study of the baser and brutal aspects of nature and man must be admitted. But Zola cannot be described as a realist in the same sense as Defoe or Lesage or Tolstoy or even as Flaubert. Those latter did make

(1) Cp. Madame Bovary p.9.
The film Madame Bovary gives a fairly faithful representation of the spirit of the book, though it differs from it in certain unimportant details.

an effort to see life steadily and see it whole, as Matthew Arnold has inculcated. And the better representatives of the School, men like Maupassant and Daudet, were genuine realists, not because they had any scientific axe to grind or naturalistic theory to uphold, but because they looked on life with penetrating eyes and described with amazing vividness exactly what they saw. Very probably Charles Dickens had a far greater influence over the mind of Daudet than any of his Naturalistic contemporaries.

If the Romantic movement gave birth to the Parnassians, it was the Realistic school which left its greatest impression upon them. It is true that their poetry escaped from the contagion of ugliness and brutality which marked that School, but it was none the less objective in character, and selected such themes as detailed landscapes, historical scenes accurately reproduced, realistic studies of modern life and so forth. Attention to detail and concision of style were thoroughly mastered, and little if anything at all was left to individual interpretation.

Just as there came a reaction to the Naturalistic movement in general, so there came a corresponding reaction to the Realism of the Parnassian school. For the Symbolist movement, as it was called, the forerunners of which, Herbert Palmer reminds us, were certainly Coleridge and Blake, revolted against the precepts of the Parnassians and the legacy of the Romantic school, and was, indeed, a reaction against Naturalism as well, in so far as the influence of Naturalism was to be traced in the poetry of the Parnassians. As the latter had borrowed from the plastic arts, so the Symbolists strove to catch the vagueness, mystery and suggestiveness of music. De la musique avant

toute chose became something like a slogan for this new school which was headed by men like Paul Verlaine, himself a lyric poet of the first order, comparable with Shelley or Heine. As a matter of fact, in the Symbolist movement French poetry reverted more or less to what it had been in the early part of the century, to the suggestive imagery and musical vagueness of Lamertine.

Chief among the novelists who carried the revolt against Naturalism were J.K. Huysmans and Paul Bourget, who were, in addition Léon Bloy's peculiar bêtes noires. The former, like many another French author, began as a Naturalist, and in his work we see all the tendencies of the Naturalist school and the extreme limit of the reaction they produced. In Huysmans there was, in fact, a complete somersault from "animalism" to mysticism. His early books depicted the hideousness of things with Flemish minuteness, and the world seems to reek in his nostrils. He goes out of his way to choose the most repulsive subjects and appears to enjoy a bitter satisfaction in dwelling on the most sordid aspects of his loathesome vision, reaching the nadir of his Naturalism in Là-Bas, a disgusting study of Satanism. Whether Huysmans ever descended as low as the abject despair of Léon Bloy and Charles Baudelaire is difficult to ascertain. He certainly did follow Bloy in one particular at any rate: for, like the author of Le Désespéré, he sought refuge in a Trappist monastery. That experience and the conversion it wrought is movingly told in En Route, a book which is marked by its poignant sincerity and the sheer beauty of many of the scenes and passages.

It was just as this book was coming through the press that Bloy suffered a rather mean blow from its author, and from that time his former attitude of friendship changed to one of understandable hostility. In La Femme Pauvre Bloy stigmatizes Huysmans as Folatin the futurist painted who is described as

"...a precious suddenly discovering Catholicism in a stained-glass masterpiece or a stave of plainchant, going off to the Trappists to be documented on the Aesthetics of Prayer and the Beauty of Renunciation, finding more grandeur in a formal service than in a Nuptial Mass...&c." (1).

When Bloy found that he was being used by the astute Fleming as a Cat's Paw we can imagine the fury of his wrath!

"...He utilized me," he says, "to avenge himself on some of his enemies who he dared not attack openly, with no thought of the terrible consequences to me. Most of the aggressive pages in Le Désespère were written on notes he gave me. If Huysmans in whom I placed infinite trust and who saw more clearly than I did the risks I was running in barring the road to my literary career, had really been my friend, he should have warned me of the danger." (2)

Paul Bourget, a prolific writer and amazingly popular in his day, would not now be regarded as a first class novelist. Nevertheless he does deserve the credit of reinstating psychology in the position from which it had been ousted by the physiology of the Naturalists. Choosing for his field of observation the fashionable world of Paris he became the psychologist

(1) La Femme Pauvre See pp. 183-186 and pp. 365-372.

(2) From letter published in the Cahiers Léon Bloy, 1934.

and novelist of Society. That would probably be one of the main reasons for Bloy's antipathy. "How on earth," one can almost hear him growling, "does Bourget waste his time and his talent in analysing the soul of mediocrity?" The novelist, too, was the recipient of the following letter, which most certainly did not improve relationships between them:

"...You are blissfully ignorant O fortunate novelist of the irony of fate. Life has been kinder to you than to me. You have the gift of pleasing words, a gift denied to me. No one would ever suspect you of aiming at a literary dictatorship, the very nature of your talent drives away such a thought. You are an amiable and attractive writer, incapable of arousing in your neighbour the spirit of revolt, which it has always been my misfortune to do. Your books in their innumerable editions, are seized upon and passed from hand to hand in elegant feminine circles." (1)

No one now denies that as novels proper, Bourget's books are failures. His characters do not reveal themselves by their acts and words. They are "explained" to us by the dissertations of the author. Apart from these, we are left with "novelette" plots of the most commonplace description.

It is interesting to note that Paul Bourget features in Le Désespéré as the hard, stingy Alexis Dularier to whom Marchenoir appeals in vain for a trifling sum to cover his father's funeral expenses.

Now it can scarcely be challenged that the tendency towards Realism and Naturalism did have an effect on Bloy's work, both in a positive and negative sense. When we read his two novels, Le Désespéré and La Femme Pauvre, we cannot fail to be impressed by the out-and-out realism of his descriptive passages. For instance, the smell of the room in which baby

(1) Quoted in Léon Bloy - the Pauper Prophet p.32.

Lazare died nauseated in our nostrils long after the book has been finished. Here is the relevant passage:

"...From a hateful little cellar, certainly never chosen as a shelter by the noble temper of any wine there seemed to rise, at the beginning of night black things, ants of darkness, which poured out along the cracks and joints of a crazed and crannied parquet floor.

The evidence of monstrous filth cried to high heaven. That house deceptively laundered with a few pails of water when visitors were expected, was actually slimy from top to bottom with none knew what dread deposits which it would have taken endless scrapings to clean off. The Gorgon of vomit squatted in the kitchen, which only a conflagration might have been able to purify. From the very outset a stove had to be set up in another room. At the end of the garden, and what a garden! there steadfastly persisted a heap of appalling refuse which the landlord had promised to have removed, and which was never to disappear.

Then all of a sudden, the abomination. An indefinable odour, midway between the musty stench of an underground passage stocked with carrion and the stifling alkalinity of an open sewer came surreptitiously to assault the mucous membranes of the despairing tenants.

This smell did not specifically emerge from the toilets which in any case were almost beyond being put to use, or from any other determinate point. It crawled about through the confined space of the house and unrolled like a ribbon of smoke describing circles, ovals, spirals, zig-zags. It undulated around the furniture, rose to the ceiling, flowed down again along the doors, escaped into the stairway, prowled from one room to another, leaving everywhere a sort of steam of putrefaction and excrement." (1)

Passages like these match anything in Zola. Indeed, Bloy's repeated references to "excrement" and the less savoury aspects of life go far towards explaining the reputation he earned as being a scatological writer.

(1) La Femme Pauvre p.22100. (Tr. in Léon Bloy - Pilgrim of the Absolute pp.169-170)

Yet Marchennoir's negative reaction to Realism and Naturalism is far more striking than any of the positive gains he owed to that movement. His intense hatred for the high priest of Naturalism(1) is fiercely expressed in his pamphlet Je m'accuse, and the godlessness of the Realist philosophy, the thinly veiled scepticism of the cultured Renan and the pantheism of Victor Hugo were objects of his vehement scorn and denunciatory eloquence. He could see in these reputed leaders of French thought and letters elements of the Antichrist who was out to ravish and destroy the soul of his beloved France.

The recoil from Naturalism witnessed in France in the late nineteenth century, which produced the literary mysticism of the Symbolists and the reaction of novelists like Huysmans and Bourget does not explain the profound religious mysticism of Léon Bloy. That was a gift he inherited from his mother who was of Spanish extraction, and he appropriated it in all its fulness on his conversion to Catholicism in his early twenties, just before the German invasion of 1870. The unusual quality of that mysticism, born of deep meditation on the Cross and Passion of our Lord is seen in all its grandeur in the letters he wrote to his friend Georges Landry while still under thirty years of age.(2) No gradual growth, but completely developed from his conversion, he carried it with him all through his working life. Combined with the more inspiring elements of the Realist school, the legacy of literary abandon left by the Romanticists and the poetic influence of the Parnassians - especially of Baudelaire - on the

(1) i.e. Zola

(2) Lettres de Jeunesse See the early letters.

essentially poetic soul of the Catholic writer, this mysticism has produced some forty volumes containing some of the finest passages that have ever come from the pen of a master of French prose. Bloy's pre-eminence as a prosateur is acknowledged by all - his friends and his enemies alike.

A very brief outline of the main social, political and religious tendencies which came into play during Bloy's life-time will help us to understand some of the characteristics of our author.

The rival factions of clericalism and anticlericalism were fairly strong in France during the latter part of the nineteenth century. Educational laws introduced by Jules Ferry certainly elevated the standard of public instruction, but they reacted heavily against the schools and colleges in the hands of the Catholic clergy. In the end, measures were enacted making state schools an essential condition of public employment, whether in a civil or military capacity. One of the serious disadvantages of the development of education in France was linked up with the growth of centralised bureaucracy under the Parliamentary Republic. A generation of half-educated young men, disdaining manual toil, sought careers in petty official posts, too often needlessly created for them at the cost of the taxpayer. From this almost parasitic class, unfitted as it was for productive labour, came the journalists of mediocre talent who over-ran the country. A cheap and unlicensed press became a national evil in France, since many of the most widely circulated organs of every political shade - socialist, antisemitic, clerical and anticlerical - were

merely organs of violence and defamation, propagating in every corner of the land the spirit of bitterness and dissention, thus constituting a rather deplorable feature of social life under the Third Republic.

Into this arena of political pamphleteering and lampooning entered Marchenoir, the Swordsman of the Lord. His rapier was keen and swift and devastating. It knew no mercy. He asked for none himself and he gave none. Unfortunately for him, it was no windmills he tilted at, but the tender susceptibilities of very human men. Anything that was relative and mediocre encountered the savage, uncompromising violence of this superb soldier of the Absolute. In this respect Léon Bloy was no respecter of persons. Friends and foes alike experienced the vials of his wrath. "Léon Bloy," his friend Barbey d'Aurevilly used to say, "is a cathedral gargoyle who pours down the water of heaven on the good and on the wicked." (1) After the manner of Ishmael, "his hand was against every man and every man's hand was against him." (2) This was because he lived and worked and wrote "for God alone." (3) Nothing merely human, however precious, was allowed to come between Bloy's soul and the Absolute he sought to follow. The price he had to pay for such undeviating loyalty has been well brought out by Rachilde, that knowledgeable and astute lady critic in an article in Le Mercure:

"...A man," she there states, "who has the whole world against him, especially his best friends, must be closer to the truth than other folks - the Absolute everywhere!. Léon Bloy had to choose, in the life of letters, between perpetual prostitution and eternal indigence. So he became a beggar. He was young,

(1) We have been Friends together p.109

(2) Gen. 16.12

(3) Mon. Journal Vol.1. p.71 and elsewhere

loved, admired, feared and...he became all at once a poor man. Were you an Emperor himself you would always be a poor specimen before his vision of glory! A windfall or out-and-out penury. Such is the world's choice. He preferred the choice of heaven though it made a beggar of him. Two little children dead by reason of something more deadly than dire poverty, that is to say, mediocrity. A man has grounds, you know, for hammering his sentences on people's pates when he has had his breast on an anvil like that."(1)

The last decade of the nineteenth century brought to France the rise of an antisemitic movement of no mean virulence. A journal was founded in Paris called Libre Parole, whose editor was Drumont, the author of the notorious France Juive. The latter was a violent antisemitic work written to denounce the influence exercised by the Jewish financiers in the politics of the Third Republic. Drumont's paper took a leading part in the exposure of the Panama scandal which revealed something of the corruption undermining the politics of the time. The implication of certain Jewish financiers with republican politicians aided the antisemites in their special propaganda. It was alleged that the Government of the Third Republic had been organised for the benefit of Jewish emigrants from Germany, who had thus enriched themselves at the expense of the hard-working and unsuspecting people of France. Libre Parole which had become a popular organ with reactionary and discontented social elements, enlisted the support of the Catholics by attributing the anti-religious policy of the Republic to the influence of the Jews. Bitter memories of the Ferry decrees were skilfully revived: and it was pointed out that sometimes the laicization of schools or the expulsion of monks and nuns was the work of some Jewish functionary or other.

(1) Mon Journal Vol.1. p.110

In this way religious sentiment and race prejudice were intentionally utilized in order to complicate an issue which was primarily aimed against capital. Thus, the campaign was conducted with weapons of scurrility and defamation which had made an unlicensed press a demoralising national evil. This cunningly engineered fomentation against the Jews proved an admirable breeding-ground for the passionate emotions which were to split France into two (with the whole world looking on) over the Dreyfus affair.

The incident of the Jewish officer, Captain Alfred Dreyfus, charged with having supplied a Government of the Triple Alliance with French military secrets, was fully reported in Libre Parole. The trial, the banishment, the recall and subsequent re-trial of Dreyfus, leading to his acquittal, are events still within living memory and need not be repeated here. Suffice to say that the agitation aroused between the Dreyfusards and the anti-Dreyfusards amounted to something like a bloodless civil war which affected not France alone but the whole world as well.

In the summer of 1892, just when the antisemitic movement was rifest, Léon Bloy penned Le Salut par les Juifs. If Bloy had secured the position in French literature to which he was entitled, this book should have proved an effective counterblast to antisemitism. As it was, his glory only became apparent long after his death. He, unfortunately, was not to live by his books, but all the same his books were to live, as he himself confidently foretold. So his pamphlet, which opens with a scathing indictment

of Drumont, fell like a wet squib into the arena. Through some personal mismanagement on the part of Bloy and his publisher, the bulk of the copies were allowed to lie unused in the shop of the latter, who had meantime changed his occupation to become a plumber! Fully twelve years were to elapse before this remarkable book came under the notice of the young Maritains - Jacques and his wife Raissa, a Russian Jewess. Realising the significance of the work, they had it published for Bloy at their own expense.(1)

After having painfully pondered the pages of Le Salut par les Juifs and realised that the Jews had in Bloy one of their most understanding friends, it was a little difficult, to begin with, to penetrate his personal attitude in the Dreyfus affair. It was quite evident that it was not because the condemned officer was of Hebrew lineage that the writer did not come out in the open and support him. For he deliberately dissociates himself from the substantial number of Catholics who had joined forces with Drumont. It might have been thought that his intense animosity against Zola, who took a prominent part in the defence of Dreyfus, would at least be partly to blame for his lack of advocacy in what would appear to be a righteous cause. Yet that could hardly explain the situation altogether. When busy with this perplexing problem, a sudden flood of light was thrown upon it on reading Bloy's diatribe against Zola. For there he states:

(1) See the Preface to Le Salut par les Juifs dated Nov. 1905
This edition was dedicated to Raissa Maritain.

"...To finish with this dirty Dreyfus affair; I am compelled, in spite of the extraordinary infamy of the majority of his friends, to consider very probable that the wretched man is expiating on the Devil's Isle some one else's crime...Dreyfus might, therefore, have been the victim of a frightful iniquity. Well: what of it? There are a million or two of such unfortunates in every generation, and nobody takes any notice of them. The interesting thing for me would be to know who is the person for whom this convict is expiating? For God is infinitely righteous, and each man in this world as in the other, always gets what he deserves.

This man was wealthy. Where did he get his wealth, and what use did he make of it? As he is paying for other people's sins in his prison, who knows if someone is not paying for him, in a still more fearful manner, at the bottom of some cave? And when you look at the matter in that light, other considerations are quite beside the point."(1)

Thus we can see that it was the idiosyncrasy of Bloy's religious convictions that led him to adopt an attitude of apparent aloofness to the unjustly condemned exile. He regarded his own miserable sufferings in the light of an expiation which he had to bear with such fortitude as he was able. And if God was dealing out to him what he deserved, then He could surely be trusted to treat the unhappy convict in the same manner without any interference on Bloy's part. Once Bloy's doctrine of suffering is fully understood, as it is unfolded in the following chapters, it will be seen that his standpoint in the Dreyfus affair is a notable example of one of his cardinal principles - "payment through suffering."

In some ways there is a great deal to be said for the underlying attitude of the man of the Absolute. What justification could there be sub specie aeternitatis For Zola's championship of the unjustly punished Dreyfus, when he himself, through his -----

(1) Je m'accuse p.37 O.C.

notorious books was the executioner of the souls of thousands of his readers? Little did the author of *Fécundité* care about besmirching the poor, the weak and all those who could not protect themselves. As the writer of Je m'accuse says:

"...I thought I saw one of those recently crushed, (i.e. through reading Zola) in an Isle of the Abyss, gripped by spiritual chains stronger than iron, isolated in a Hell of hopelessness, paying a penalty which could not possibly be altered throughout all eternity."(1)

When we are cognisant of such deep-seated antagonism, born of religious conviction, cherished against Dreyfus' so-called champion, we can understand somewhat better Bloy's relationship to the painter Henry de Groux. There can be little doubt that the latter's admiration for Zola in espousing so warmly the Dreyfus cause, went a good distance towards alienating the two friends. One would have thought that a friendship begun so auspiciously would have been hard indeed to dissolve. As a young talented artist, but lately arrived in Paris to "make his career", de Groux had written to the ostracised man of letters:

"I love you because you are Great, terribly Strong and terribly Abandoned."

Immediately Léon Bloy thought of this sentence of Hello's, which was very often on his lips:

"He who loves greatness and who loves the abandoned, when he comes close to the abandoned will recognise greatness, if any greatness be there."(2)

Bloy's *Lettres à Henry de Groux* bear ample witness to the strength and intimacy of this relationship. Yet, largely, as has been said, through de Groux's uncritical admiration for Zola in

(1) Je m'accuse p.114

(2) Léon Bloy: ses debuts litteraires p.37

his partisanship for Dreyfus, this friendship was forced into an abeyance for nearly twenty years. Here is an extract from a letter sent by Bloy from Denmark, during his sojourn in that country, which marks the commencement of their estrangement:

"...I have spent my life in speaking or in writing that there is only one interest in the world: the glory of God, and that everything else is vain and odious.

To sum it all up: you believe, like everybody else, that there are considerations which must be brought up before the consideration of God's Honour; considerations which are more urgent, more serious and you are full of this idea that a wretch(1) who outrages God all his life and who is proud of the fact, could possibly be anything else than the vile scum of the earth he is. What a mind to have!"(2)

Apart from the early Fathers and the men of the Middle Ages - a period whose nostalgic memory haunted Bloy's mind like a lost Eden - our author's more immediate religious antecedents were the autocratic theocrats Joseph de Maistre and Vicomte de Boland. At the outset of his literary career he no doubt was of the opinion, like many another Catholic, that the victory of Christ was to be achieved through some kind of politico-religious autocracy, when all men would be led to acknowledge the Supremacy of the Papal See. As time went on, however, and as he plunged deeper and deeper into the abyss of despair, his eyes were opened to the futility of this facile, cut-and-dried solution to the human problem. Marchenoir

"if he had pondered over de Boland and the rest of the theorists of equilibrium, knows now all the reasonable things that can be said in the way of comfort, among virtuous people, about the temporary reprobation of three-quarters of humanity,"
(3)

(1) i.e. Zola

(2) Mon Journal Vol.1. p.119

(3) Le Désespéré p.150

and he had no more to do with it. For by the time Le Désespéré had been written, its author had reached the bottom of the pit, and had ceased to hope that any political measures could prepare the way for the Second Advent. The cruelly painful experiences he was called upon to endure robbed him entirely of the view of the future held out by the optimism of the political philosophers. Instead he became, as we shall see, the fiery and potent prophet of an extreme apocalypticism, of which he felt called by God to be the intransigent alarm.

Whether subsequent events in history, with its Belsen horrors, Nagasaki, and the Damocles threat of the Hydrogen Bomb, give any warrant for such urgent warnings of the cataclysmic Wrath of God, may for some people, be difficult to judge. But there are others who are inclined to think that they do. Even the gloomy Dean, who had foreseen, to the annoyance of respectable people, some very ugly consequences emerging from the popular Victorian optimism of that day, remarks in his Diary:

"I never predicted anything like so bad as what actually has happened."(1)

Now, in some respects America and England both make their contribution towards the tout ensemble of Bloy's genius. We have mentioned his indebtedness to Baudelaire, and all literary critics are agreed that Baudelaire's temperament was profoundly influenced by the eery, uncanny spirit of Edgar Allan Poe, to whom Bloy refers in a review of d'Aurevilly's Un Prêtre Marié as

(1) See Diary of a Dean: St Paul's, 1911-1934

"the panic-stricken Edgar Poe, whose intellectual life was a convulsion that would shatter one's nerves like the overwrought strings of a frantic musician's violin."(1)

Sir Walter Scott is often mentioned in Bloy's earlier works, as is also Thomas Carlyle, who appealed to the like-spirited pamphleteer as "the thundering Jupiter of the poisoned epithet."(2)

Now Léon Bloy himself gives a typically high-coloured cross-section of the social and political life of his earliest infancy when he describes what went on in France during the Apparition of the Virgin at La Salette(3) :

"One may wonder indeed, what there possibly could have been to discuss in France at all, other than that unutterably poignant and awe-inspiring event! Yet, that was the time when a pompous heretic was majestically leading a usurper of the crown to the abyss, a ponderous pot-belly on the throne of Saint Louis! A miserable revolution was hatching under the refuse-dump of a most squalid political duplicity. The Plato of the revolutionary rabble, the cruel free-thinker Proudhon, with his morbid genius, was stirring up the susceptibilities of the century's destitute to a fearful height in every pestilential slum-alley. Madame Sand, that foundling of the pedant Jean-Jacques was puffing herself up like a fabulist's stooge in the cess-pool of heroic adulteries, and was preaching against Almighty God. Eugène Sue, the light of a growing socialism that had been engendered by the hierophant Saint-Simon, and co-substantial with his father, was slabbering, in honour of a real Christianity, two thousand columns of red ink to boost up the Society of Jesus. Fourier, the Icarian prophet, another hierophant fixed in the algebraic formulae of a world-in-the-remaking, was lulling his mighty spirit to sleep in the tobacco-smoke and censers of his alcoholic worshippers. Michelet, the Byzantine crocodile of history was shedding his hypocritical and sacriligious tears against the Church: and it seems that not even in hell could there be an adequate expiation for such an enormity...And now, they have turned out as you have seen, each and all of them gone the way of death just as often as they have attempted to substitute themselves in the place of God, and the whole business simply goes for nothing. And yet they do suffice to create a stumbling-block against

(1) Œuvres inédites pub. with La Chevalière de la Mort.

(2) La Chevalière de la Mort p.35

(3) See chapter on La Salette (Part II Ch.5) and the Appendix to that chapter.)

what I dare to call the Epiphany of Our Lady of the Seven Sorrows."(1)

It was, accordingly, into a setting somewhat like the above, modified no doubt, by the changes that half a century bring about, that Léon Bloy revealed himself to two reporters who came to interview him on behalf of La Littérature Contemporaine. The writer was about fifty-eight years of age, and by that time he had earned quite a name for himself in Paris, though his celebrity by no means liberated him from the appalling poverty which dogged his footsteps like a Hound of the Irrevocable till his dying day.(2) He makes room for the incident, with some satisfaction, in the pages of L'Invendable:

"Behind Montmartre, in a place marked by solitude and destitution, the author of Le Désespéré has found a refuge. A poor man, himself, he lives in the midst of the poor, whom he loves and serves as the living image of Jesus Christ. His tormented existence here finds a welcome resting-place. With his wife and daughters, he pursues his thankless task - a work full of maledictions, outbursts of wrath and infinite hopes.

Léon Bloy is the last of the prophets. He is possessed by the fierce naive spirit which belonged to the nabis of ancient Judea. Each of his books is a cry of faith, where we feel our hearts tremble and quicken. From Le Mendiant Ingrat to La Femme Pauvre the same painful exaltation, the same furies, the same tragic utterances constitute the bill of fare of a genius which is bitter and desolate.

Standing on the threshold of his door, he looks at us coming towards him. And from his opening words the bitterness of his destiny rises to his lips:

'You are coming to see me? But are you not aware that I am a dangerous man who must on no account be approached?'

In spite of that, we find our way into the small, simply-furnished apartment which serves him as his work-office. Just for a minute his eyes alone interrogate us, and there is a moment or two of silence between us.

(1) Le Symbolisme de l'Apparition pp. 23-24

(2) See Part III, Ch.1. of this work.

This violent writer has a gentle and ingenuous look, for all the world like a good pastor, but the curves of his face reveal a will that is vigorous. His judgments are abrupt and severe and they are formulated with no little heat.

'Literary schools? There are none. The last school was Zola's. There have been none since then.

Besides, schools can only kill art. I deny that existing schools serve any useful function. People speak of a Catholic tendency? But if it is Huysmans you are getting at, remember I am the man who made him: I happen to be the hen who laid him. I spent six years of my life catechising Huysmans. It was I who wrote Les Dernières Colonnes de l'Eglise. What have you to say about that? If I busied myself about a book like that, it was surely because my conscience was interested in the subject. People tell me: 'Let no one raise his voice. Here comes Huysmans, Father of the Church. Bourget, Brunetière, Coppée - there they go, the pillars of the Church!' But what about this book I have written? Well: I had to speak out, for I knew perfectly that if I didn't speak, nobody else would.

I have come across priests who really believe that Coppée is a great Christian. It is staggering. And poor old Huysmans, who doesn't even know the catechism! I have exposed in one of my books that he doesn't even know the Immaculate Conception, and that he confuses it with the doctrine of the Incarnation - through sheer ignorance of past participles. The Church says, 'Mary conceived without sin.' (Marie conçue sans péché.) The man in the street takes that to be 'Mary actually did the conceiving.' (Marie conçut.) Huysmans makes the same blunder... like Zola!'

Léon Bloy's mouth registered supreme disdain. Then he leant towards us and continued:

'Literary tendencies, did you say? But there are none. Everybody is on the hunt after success. Where is Lavedan going. Yes, tell me where a man like Lavedan is going? He's got his eye on £ " S " D, I can tell you: he can't help looking for success by all the familiar devices.'

'And the novel?'

'Novels, my friends? - There are no such things. There are merely attempts at novel-journalesse. One day Rictus - the only poet of our epoch - said to me, 'I'm going to put you on the track of a real novelist.' And he lent me Charles Louis Philippe's Bubu de Montmartre. The perusal of that book had an astonishing effect upon me. There is real genius in the way he expresses himself. A most remarkable man.

'They tell me about Madame de Noailles. Well, as far as I have read her, there is precious little in her. Besides, I stick to a law of my own. Any book which does not speak about the poor, or doesn't take stock of the poor, is a book to be spat upon.

'Speaking personally, I have a book in the stocks. It will possibly be my next book - on Money.

'You've got to understand that I am nourished on Holy Writ and Biblical exegesis. That is my foundation. I have given ten years of my life to the study of Scriptural symbolism. You will find that recurring as the preoccupation of all my books - divine reality expressed by a symbol. Wherever you turn you will find that. It is in this light, then, that I consider Money as the symbol of God.

'Jesus promised His apostles that they were to be the judges of the earth. But among those apostles you will find Judas. Judas has not ceased being an apostle. He has become a wicked apostle, but he is still an apostle. He is therefore among those who will judge the world. But what, you may well ask, will Judas judge? There is a question for you.

'He will be the judge of those who have not paid up their money. Because Judas, himself, has paid up. He will be the judge, then, of those who are broken because they cannot pay their dues.

'Ah! those millionaires! Just imagine the burning mortification of those individuals when they are required to atone for every particle of their homicidal, ill-gotten gains, and when they see on their death-bed this mountain of torments looming up in front of them! One is stricken to the heart with compassion for monsters like Pierpont Morgan, who have amassed so much gold, and who, like Judas, when he sold the blood of Christ, only get thirty pieces of silver out of it after all.

'Any man who makes his fortune sells the Christ. You cannot be rich save through selling the Body and Blood of Our Lord Jesus Christ. That is the reason why Jesus Christ has uttered the terrible warning: Vae divitibus! (Woe unto the rich!)

'So, you can take it from me that I am going to compose my projected book with a will that is absolutely bent on the malediction of the wealthy and their execration.'

And now, two children come into the room. Léon Bloy's anger, blazing a moment ago, quiets down suddenly. He smiles.

'Here are my two daughters, Véronique and Madeleine. I have dedicated my Mendiant Ingrat to them.'

We ask: 'What are your opinions on critical reviewing?'

'Critical reviewing, did you say? There's no such thing. In the old days that was a feature in every periodical. Now-a-days it is conspicuous by its absence. There just aren't any more critical reviews.'

'You wouldn't guess what a Belgian said of me in a recent article? 'That I'm consumed with envy; that I am dying with despair at not having acquired any decorations, and that if I were given a few honours my hostility against the rich would obviously all fall to pieces!'

Léon Bloy gave a resounding laugh. He took up a note-book and fingered the pages.

- 'Just a moment,' he said, 'here is a note:

'Any man, when he comes into the world, brings with him his death-principle. That is absolutely decisive. There is one who is born with a chimney-stack over his head and another with a cannon-ball in his open bosom. For myself, I was born in an oven. A man is born with his entire destiny.'

The note-book is shut and Léon Bloy, in a more familiar tone confides to us a few of his anecdotes.

'There is one thing, though, that I swallowed with rather a bad grace: I was the author of Sueur de Sang, (which nobody mentions now-a-days) but, mind you, it is the boys of the Margueritte who should have the right to speak about the 1870 war! I do take that pretty badly. Keep away altogether from any superiority of talent one has over individuals who would go on all fours to write a book, surely I am the person who waged that war and can feel the things about which they can have no idea at all.

'I like historical studies. Besides the Bible, I read the history of the Lower Empire, and also the history of Napoleon. I would like to write a book on this subject. I have got in touch with Henry Houssaye. I've also written a

few times to Frederick Masson; but he has never replied.'

And with that last touch of bitterness, Léon Bloy shook us by the hand." (1)

Such, then, was the lion in his den - a true picture, indeed, which gives revealing hints of those religious convictions which shall be more adequately amplified in the following pages. And, just to round this portrait off, it might not be inappropriate to mention a tribute to the religious thinker as it was given by the Abbé Pient Cornuau in a letter to the Marches de Provence:

'Bloy, then, before anything else is a great Christian: and that has to be said with no ambiguity in a Review which is doing itself the honour of presenting him to the public. Yes, a Christian in all the strength of the word: that is to say, a friend of Christ to the point of limitless sacrifice - even to death itself. And not simply a rank-and-file Christian, but a leading Christian: one of those whose express mission it is to call forth souls and lead them to the Master...

I think rapturously of the genuine beauty of a thought which was written by a soul who knew him best in the world -

'The spirit of Léon Bloy is like a cathedral where the Holy Sacrament will always be exposed.'" (2)

(1) L'Invendable pp.152-157

(2) Le Pèlerin de l'Absolu p.1952 O.C.

PART II LANDMARKS IN BLOY'S PILGRIMAGE

CHAPTER I. YOUTH

After the brief sketch of the times in which Bloy lived, we must now focus our attention on the man himself. This is a task of considerable magnitude, for the interplay of life and thought in the case of the French author is so intimate that it is impossible to separate the one from the other. Not only did he possess a keen avidity for life in all its fulness, but also an amazing power of artistic expression, which constrained him to give utterance to an almost continuous commentary on the experiences that life brought his way.

In this second part of our study, therefore, no attempt will be made to write a biography of Bloy, in the accepted sense of the word. Our intention is rather to select a few of the salient phases and incidents in Bloy's career and to show how his life-story influenced his religious thought. The chapter-headings, accordingly, which call attention to certain periods or incidents or (as e.g. the Chapter on Despair) temperamental tendencies, are no more than points of departure for the discussion of the peculiarities of Bloy's thought. This being the case, it will not be surprising to find that from any one particular point in our author's life-history, we may find ourselves ranging over the whole scope of his religious thinking. This method has indeed been followed, to some extent, by Colleye in his L'Ame de Léon Bloy,

but the Belgian commentator has made a stricter effort to keep within the limits of chronology as he elucidates the psychological development of Bloy up to the publication of Le Désespéré. In the following chapters, however, we shall hold ourselves free to range as extensively as we legitimately can over the whole gamut of Bloy's religious ideas from the spring-board of the point in his life or temperament to which the chapter-title refers. In this way we shall be examining biological phenomena from the synthetic point of view of Bloy's life viewed as a whole.

"Call no man happy until he is dead," is a reflection of one of the world's wise men. But probably a truer and a wiser statement might be: "Call no man's life meaningful until he is dead." That is peculiarly true of Léon Bloy. We have to wait until his life has completed its full-orbed totality before we can grasp its worth and significance. From this elevated stand-point we can the more readily appreciate the lesser details, which have helped to give significant value to a life which is being regarded synoptically.

A mysteriously providential sanction seemed to be given to the year in which Léon-Marie Bloy was born at Périgueux on the 6th of July. For 1846 was precisely the year which witnessed the remarkable Apparition of the Virgin to the two young peasant children at the mountain of La Salette. As Bloy wrote to his

friend Termier many years after:

"I was born in '46, at the moment decreed by God, seventy days before the Apparition. I belong, therefore, to La Salette in a way that is peculiarly mysterious."(1)

A message of impending doom was revealed by the heavenly Visitant, who spoke in tears under visible emotional agitation. The babe at Périgueux, therefore, was born under the sign of tears. That was a portent and a symbol of the whole of Bloy's life. For anyone who, like Bloy, does not admit the presence of "chance"(2) in human life, this concomitance of circumstances is certainly more than mere coincidence. Bloy was to learn about that in good time, thanks to his encounter with a devout priest who was the devoted servant of the Holy Virgin.(3)

Even from his infancy the boy was a misfit in the society of his day, like that other genius van Gogh,(4) who only found peace through his own violent departure from an inhospitable world. Only the death-urge in Bloy took a different direction. An overmastering desire for martyrdom in the cause of Christian truth was perhaps the dominant motive for his life and witness. Though he was never called upon to pay the supreme price, his life was a perpetual immolation. And, after all, a living martyrdom which was to last for half-a-century crowned Bloy's brow with as precious a wreath as ever adorned that of any martyr of the Faith. May we not with justice say that such a period of spiritual agonising was responsible for

(1) L'Invendable p.247

(2) See Le Mendiant Ingrat Vol.1.p.209& Vol.11.p.25 (inter alia)

(3) The Abbé Tardif de Moidrey.

(4) See Vincent van Gogh in the Albatross Press (Leipzig)

the Dostoievskian shiver which Bloy caused to pass through French literature?

In his boyhood, then, he rebelled against the discipline of the family, of the school, and of decent employment. All those influences which, very right and proper in their way, tended to turn him out a stereotyped product of society comme les autres, he despised with a bitter hatred. One of the saddest trials of his childhood and youth was the deep-seated antagonism which marred his relationship with his father, Jean Bloy, a civil servant for Bridges and Highways. This parent was a secular-minded person with little time for religion, who tried to do his best by his family according to his own lights of public honour and devotion to duty.

The youthful Bloy for a time turned his attention to art, and a few of his efforts especially a self-portraiture at the age of seventeen, show considerable promise. This quite remarkable picture displays a young man with a look of pained defiance in his eyes, who, with furrowed brow is biting his finger-nails in an attitude of rebellious desperation. It appears, among other books, in Hubert Colleze's L'Ame de Léon Bloy, with the young artist's half-mocking verdict on his own appearance inscribed at the bottom right-hand corner: "Promesses d'un beau visage." Novembre 1863. ("The makings of a handsome face.")

At the same time he read omniverously on historical and religious subjects, and even tried his 'prentice hand at making a tragedy. His father, however, had no time for such literary trifling. A journal written in Léon's adolescence reveals something of the ironical disgust which such a tragedy (Lucrèce) aroused in a parent whose offspring was developing along lines that were tantalisingly not according to plan. Among other things it states:

"...coming out of the office this evening (16th June, 1862) when we were quite alone, I took Papa into my confidence as to my projected tragedy. To portray his astonishment would scarcely be possible, and I am not going to try it. But after supper, during which I was unable to take anything, so great was my emotion, I read a few of my verses to him which I judged rather finer than usual. I was panting with anxiety. He replied coldly that these were not verses I had made and that I had better give up reading them. I never would have believed I could have suffered so much as I did at that moment. I was literally at the point of delirium. I sat down at the piano: but my fingers refused to play. My inflated heart could not find tears, and if only they had come I would have felt better...

(17th June 1862) Poetry - I will do no more."(1)

Though Bloy was not aware of it at the time, this was probably a good resolution to make. At this experimental period of his life, he was not in a position to determine that neither painting nor poetry was to be his medium, but prose; but a prose which was both to paint and to dramatise as well.

The undercurrent of father-son hostility had a painful and frustrating effect on Léon's development and aspirations. Indeed, it has been isolated by a few of Bloy's commentators and critics (by no means all detractors) as probably the main factor which illumines the peculiarities of his later life.

(1) L'Ame de Léon Bloy pp.38-39



As this theory tends to give, in our estimation, a twisted conception of Bloy's religious outlook, it may as well be brought under consideration at this point. The argument is put fairly concisely by Paul Jury in an article Impressions d'un Témoin in Résurrection: Léon Bloy. Jury apparently had at one time fallen under the spell of the Catholic writer and had later revolted against him. In the article he attempts to give in as objective a manner as possible, a psychological study of the author's life. Here we shall give a summarised paraphrase of the gist of what he says, taking the liberty of quoting his own words from time to time:

"I would like," says Jury, "were it only to tie myself down to a date, to get to the bottom of the deep-seated reason which prevented Léon Bloy from being understood so little by his contemporaries, by his companions and friends, and which gives some explanation of his faults and misfortunes.

We know from Le Désespéré what he thought of his father: a great deal of ill-will, which he sums up in that sentence which so strangely opens this astonishing autobiography: 'In an hour I will have succeeded in killing my father.'

Freud and psychoanalysis had not been heard of at the time, but when Jury did become acquainted with the ideas of the great Viennese, he found in this confession the magic key which opened the Oedipean drama in the soul of Léon Bloy.

"...This hatred for his father, conceived in infancy, was fought in a repressed manner by Bloy when he reached years of understanding. But the more he tried to repress it, instead of resolving or destroying it, the more it was carried over as a species of hostility to all those who occupied a 'paternal position', so to speak, in his eyes. So, until he was forty years of age, he was always 'up against' his boss, his director,

his superior, his office-chief, with the consequent impossible difficulties which he incurred. In middle life when he entered the journalistic arena, his "bosses" assumed the shape of the editors of reviews and journals which catered for Paris' public taste - Chat noir, l'Univers, Figaro, Gil Blas, Mercure de France &c."

"An underling," comments Jury, "badly treated by his boss can know the right thing a hundred times over. But one man at logger-heads with a hundred bosses! - Who is going to believe that he is always in the right?"

Jury admits that there is one exception to the general rule - Le Mercure. He attributes this to the magnanimity and benevolent open-mindedness of Valette and Rachilde, the directors of the paper.

"They were known," he remarks somewhat caustically, "to be the affable displayers of literary bears, and always ready to accord each gladiator his own turn."

"This childish need," he goes on to say, "for rebelling against all authority, which made Bloy's life so difficult for himself, is found again in his relations with the Catholics."

It throws into relief his attacks on such ecclesiastical authorities as Leo XIII, Benedict XV, Cardinal Amette, the bishops of Grenoble (with reference to La Salette), R.P. Didon, the Assumptionists, the Jesuits, the Dominicans &c.

Jury, however, carries his argument a stage further. He says that this opposition pitted against everything which occupied a more or less paternal rôle, was levelled also against those who took the place of Bloy's brothers, whether in relation to his literary confederates, his fellow-Catholics, or, in a general way, the human race as a whole. Search has been made in vain, says Jury, for any reference to Bloy's brothers in any of his

forty volumes. This seems to be a rather strange omission, seeing that the author was the second of seven sons of the Périgueux family. Paul Jury finds the reason in the secret jealousy which Bloy holds against his brothers for having monopolised his mother; for having drawn her away from himself.

"According to the law," is his comment, "which was imposed on his filial hostility, his fraternal hostility fell upon the literary confreres and on his brothers in religion; on all his contemporaries in fact."

Summing up his verdict this commentator concludes:

"In so far as it is not seen that his adult life is but a double, a magnified replica of his child-life, wherein he has transported his domestic struggles upon the public at large and on the Church: that he was undergoing the effects of a psychological mechanism displayed to an epoch where he was not a responsible party, and which all unconsciously, took command of his reflexes as an author, as a critic and as a thinker, then it is impossible to understand the life of this magnificent and sorrowful wrestler, - of this bull-dog who would growl even when looking upon heaven itself. But anyone who does understand this, accords to his tragic existence the affectionate compassion and moving admiration that it deserves."(1)

Now, it does not require an avowed Freudian to admit that, superficially speaking, a certain amount of truth may underlie this point of view. Deeper insight into the life and character of our author, however, will correct this impression. To give a psychological account of the motives which actuated the great Apostle Paul, is one thing - and there is abundant material for such a study in the pages of the New Testament - but to attempt to evaluate his theological and Christological convictions by any such method is as quixotic as trying to paint the rainbow with a Beethoven sonata. We are dealing here with incommensurable

(1) See Résurrection: Léon Bloy pp.136-140.

standards. It must be stated bluntly that a thoroughgoing determinism such as is suggested by Jury cannot be admitted.

Regarding this critic's reference to the death of Bloy's father, we do know something of the circumstances and of the reason which prevented Bloy from getting to Périgueux in time before the end of his father's life, from Joseph Bollery's carefully written biography. There the latter states:

"Having desired to see Anne-Marie(1) again before his departure (24th May, 1877) he imputed his late arrival to this circumstance and accused himself of having committed a crime. We can then understand the terms of the letter which opens Le Désespéré: 'I am a parricide, however, such is the unique vision of my spirit.'

"For a man of the Absolute like him," comments Bollery, "all the commandments of the Decalogue are equally imperious: there are no degrees in Disobedience. Moreover, by reason of universal solidarity, the faults of children can fall on the heads of parents. Léon Bloy felt himself responsible for the despairing death-pangs of his own kith and kin."(2)

This impression of the significance of the cryptic opening of Le Désespéré is fully confirmed by a letter written to Anne-Marie on July 28th, 1877. In it Bloy states:

"When I think that I was the only one of his children on whom the poor man could rely in the hour of his death-agony to sustain him with his prayers and his presence...it seems to me that I could have died with shame and chagrin. And I am always thinking about it, my poor child. That is why I am so sad. For if my father was right in counting on me during his life-time, he has even a greater right on counting on me after death.

"It is not enough to have several masses said for him and a few communions. I must give myself entirely: a complete reparation is necessary - a sacrifice absolute and with no reserve. That is my reason for wishing to become a Trappist."(3)

(1) The Véronique of Le Désespéré

(2) Léon Bloy (Essai de biographie) Vol.1. p.313.

(3) Ibid. pp.313-314

Accordingly, when Léon Bloy pondered over the likely places to which he might repair - places specially consecrated for prayer, sacrifice and expiation - without any hesitation at all he deliberately chose the most rigorous of them all, a Trappist monastery.

The sentiments expressed to Anne-Marie do not only suggest the passionate remorse of an exceptionally hypersensitive soul accusing itself for culpable negligence. They go deeper: for they have a definite bearing on Bloy's vivid sense of the inexorable in human life. As this is one of the most important contributions that Léon Bloy has to offer to religious thought, we reserve it for more detailed examination in a later chapter. (1) It is enough for us to assert, at this point, that far from any determinism pushing Bloy on, willy-nilly, it was a profound religious conviction, based on a synthetic Christian Weltanschauung of more than ordinary absolute character which caused him to make the deliberate and responsible choice of entering a Trappist monastery to make atonement for the 'crime' he had committed in failing to arrive home before his father's obsequies. The words deliberate, responsible, choice are underlined advisedly to demonstrate how actively the will was operative in the entire situation, and how far removed we are from the determinism of Jury's psychological mechanism.

As to Jury's criticism of Bloy for the absence of any

(1) See Part III, Ch.1. The Irrevocable.

reference to his brothers among his works, this is not altogether correct. There are traces of several letters to his brothers in his voluminous correspondence. Then we must remember that Bloy's reaction to his literary contemporaries assumed the form of violent abuse whenever he deemed their works to be derogatory of those absolute canons to which he believed God had called him as a Witness and Guardian. Bloy did not attempt to cut his literary and religious confreres out of his life, as Jury says he treated his brothers after the flesh. Rather did he give them a sound trouncing. According to Jury's logic, he should have done the same thing to his fellow-members of the family of Périgieux.

No: there is surely a more reasonable interpretation of those vituperative attacks; something that has a much closer connection with the distinctive religious view-point which he consistently assumed. The issue has been rather neatly clarified by Jacques Maritain in his Introduction to the Bloy anthology in English - Léon Bloy: Pilgrim of the Absolute:

"Bloy," says Maritain, "was by nature incapable of seeing and judging in themselves individuals and particular circumstances. He did not discern them. From this came - for anyone considering their immediate object - the immoderate excess of his fits of violence. The truth is, they were aimed at something else.

In these demonstrations of violence one must first of all see the consequences of a very special kind of abstraction, certainly not philosophic, but artistic: or if one prefers, a very special kind of typification: every event, every gesture, every person here and now, was instantaneously transposed, torn from all contingencies, from the concrete conditions of the human setting

which explain it and make it plausible, and was transposed, in the eyes of this fearful visionary, into the pure symbol of some devouring spiritual reality."(1)

A testimony like that coming from one who, in his early years was a valued friend of the irascible champion, lends colour to the view that there was something of the 'inhuman' attached to the Bloyan Absolute. In a way that is true: but it was rather his fierce antipathy and fear for the mediocrity of the bourgeois, (~~the~~ hoi polloi). Such mediocrity he dreaded more than flagrant sin. Is there, after all, so very much difference between this kind of typifying abstraction and that contained in the twenty-third chapter of St Matthew's Gospel? The Scribes and the pharisees no doubt squirmed at Jesus' words, as their nineteenth century counterparts would squirm at Bloy's. The only trouble was that Bloy's lash had not the same discrimination as the Master's, and on many occasions it descended on the heads of the sheep as well as of the goats.

Defending himself against those who took exception to his unseemly fits of vehemence, he says:

"I am told that I am not qualified to judge nor punish. Am I then to infer that I am not qualified to see; that I am prohibited from lifting my hand against an incendiary, who, counting on my friendly inertia, lights up under my very eyes the fuse which is to blow up a whole city?...What would you think of a man who would let his companions be poisoned for fear of offending the poisoner?..(2)

Bloy believed with all his heart that a doctrine which propounds the 'love' of God as man's chief end, must be virile

(1) Léon Bloy: Pilgrim of the Absolute. p.11

(2) Le Désespéré p.239

and not mealy-mouthed. He derived comfort from the fact that time and again Jesus pronounces His anathemas not on things but on men, whom "He designates with frightening precision."(1)

But if Bloy was impatient with the appalling mediocrity of his literary confederates and insubordinate in the face of his 'human' superiors, this after all only betokens the nature of the authority to which he gladly humbled himself to the dust. When he was living in Denmark among the 'detested' Protestants, we catch a glimpse of the authority which exercised such a powerful influence on his life and thinking.

"Just mark the characteristic traits of the Protestants," he says, "no matter to what sect they belong - hatred of penance, love of everything that is easy, monstrous indifference to all that is beautiful. 'Smoke your pipe before God's very face', a Grundtvigian professor used to say to me. Their tolerance, which is all one dreadful illusion, is only an unearthly lack of awareness for the Absolute, a demoniacal scorn of the very substance of reality."(2)

Behaviour of this kind was the height of inconsequential vulgarity and mediocrity. The man of the Absolute had no time for it. This was his attitude too, to all his 'masters' after the flesh, and to all his brother co-religionists. On earth he had no 'master'. In the realm of the relative and contingent he considered it not merely an unwilling obligation but his bounden duty to unmask the falsity, the pride and the hypocritical superiority of the bien-pensants. But the reverential awe in which he stood before the Presence of the Absolute is the universal testimony of all who had the good fortune to know him

(1) Le Désespéré p.239

(2) Mon Journal Vol.1. p.154

at all intimately.

How uncompromisingly Bloy yielded his obedience to the one authority which his conscience acknowledged, is seen from the letter he wrote to Père Roger, the Superior of the Trappist monastery on his retiral to Paris after his sojourn there. The good Father endeavoured to find his ex-penitent a post on the staff of the François, but he must have been not a little dismayed when the staunch Catholic aired his scruples in a communication to the following effect:

"Well! Supposing this place on the François were to exist, which is most unlikely, and that I was given the opportunity to take it, in spite of my title as a former editor of l'Univers, I would still require to make up my mind about the doctrine of Mgr. Dupanloup and of the whole question of liberal Gallicanism: and, in truth, I would be in some quandary as to what I should do. You take me to task, not without reason, for lacking in flexibility. Very good: but notice that in this business it is no longer a question of myself but of doctrine. I am profoundly convinced that liberalism, whether religious or political, is inconceivably fatal to the principle of obedience, and by that I mean the very principle of Faith. Pius IX said one day that liberal Catholics were men who were more dangerous than communists themselves. It is a terrible saying, I admit; yet I believe it to be correct. You can see for yourself, then, that it would be very difficult for me to succeed under such conditions. You may say that it will perhaps be possible to restrict me to some speciality or other, a kind of neutral territory such as literary criticism. But let me tell you there is no such thing as neutral territory. I am so possessed by my ideas of theocracy and of the absolute in politics that I could not refrain at any moment and on any pretext, to make resounding profession of the same."(1)

The kindly Father must have found Bloy a prickly customer to deal with. One can almost imagine him as a daughty knight with a Scotch Thistle emblazoned on his escutcheon dourly displaying the motto: Wha daur meddle wi' me!

(1) L'Ame de Léon Bloy p.167

But we have traversed rather lengthily, though it is hoped not fruitlessly from our chapter-title, and it is more than time for us to get back to our hero's youth.

A picture of Bloy's father is sketched in the opening pages of Le Désespéré. Says the author of this novel:

"He likes me well enough...in his own way. Before I had got over the stage of slabbering in my swaddling clothes, before even I had entered the world at all, he had carefully marked out all the stages of my life with the most geometrical of sollicitudes. Nothing had been forgotten except the eventuality of a leaning for literature. When it became impossible to gainsay the existence of this canker, his confusion was great and his despair knew no bounds. Finding nothing in the simple effect of an inexorable law of nature but an unholy revolt against all that he desired, and yet thoroughly pierced with his own impotency, he nevertheless gave me proof of his most unenlightened tenderness by cursing me absolutely and for all time."(1)

It is of little use to criticise this misunderstanding between father and son, for each of them belonged to different worlds. But his mother, Madame Bloy (Marie-Anne-Césarine Carrean) was of an entirely different moral calibre from her husband. She was a saint in the strictest sense of the word. Bloy says of her that he was bound to become a Christian sooner or later, even against his will, so much did she make him the special object of her importunate devotions.

"My beloved mother," he wrote to an unknown correspondent in Nov. 1875, "was always praying for me from my infancy. When indifference, to begin with, and hatred later on, took the place of faith in my heart, she redoubled her petitions, making them more fervent, longer and more profound. She lit on the altar of her heart a burning desire which was lifted perpetually to God like a flame of an inextinguishable holocaust. As for myself, I got deeper into godlessness. Prayers did not achieve anything

(1) Le Désespéré pp.12-13



and Grace always found me a rebel, hard and inflexible. One day my mother, meditating on the grievous Passion of our Divine Saviour, received the enlightenment that our Lord, who has redeemed the whole world of men through suffering for them without measure and consolation, gives enabling power to Christians (who are His own members, according to justice and reason), to carry on this marvellous work and operate relatively by their imperfect sufferings, in the same way as Jesus has operated absolutely through His unspeakable and perfect sufferings. In a communication of mysterious and ineffable sublimity, a contract was pledged between herself and God that she should make the absolute sacrifice of her health and the complete denial of all joy and of all human consolation, and that in return there would be accorded to her the full and perfect conversion of that one among her children who stood in greatest need of being converted. This portentous bargain, concluded in the presence and by the mediation of the Most Holy Virgin, received its immediate accomplishment in my mother's own person, who suddenly and irremediably lost her robust health in as complete a manner as possible without death itself overtaking her. Her life became a torment of twenty-four hours a day, and, in order that this torment might indeed be complete, and might leave nothing to be desired in sublime extravagance and most exacting heroism, the sickness assumed a character of physical humiliation and abasement which would do no good to express here. Even I myself only understood these things much later, when I had already become a Christian. It was only then that I discovered that my mother had given birth to me a second time in suffering."(1)

We see, then, that a complete contrast existed between Léon Bloy's father and mother. Everything that was bourgeois and mediocre was personified in the father, while the mother typified in her life and practice all the idealism of a devout Catholic piety. In the tension between these two extremes, the coming writer was to recoil in horror from the 'realism' of the one, and to assert with all the strength of his magnificent pen, that the only 'real', as far as he was concerned, was

(1) L'Ame de Léon Bloy pp.28-29

precisely the mystic idealism of the other, to which he was to give unforgettable and brilliant expression.

That tension was one of the many experiences of an unhappy childhood, which revealed that young Léon was constitutionally equipped for a life of exceptional sorrow and suffering. When he was but a small boy his mother found him sitting silently bathed in tears, weeping for hours without any ascribable motive. A boundless melancholy seemed to weigh upon him.

"I am", he wrote to his fiancée in 1889. "sad by nature, as one is by nature slight or fair-haired. I was born sad, deeply and horribly sad; and if I am possessed with the most violent desire for joy, it is by virtue of the mysterious law which attracts contraries...My nature...inclines me towards suffering, towards sadness, perhaps towards despair.

I remember that as a child, as a very small boy, I often refused with indignation, with a feeling of revolt, to take part in games and in pleasures, the very thought of which transported me with delight, because I felt it was nobler to suffer, and to make myself suffer by giving them up...I instinctively loved unhappiness: I wanted to be unhappy. The very word unhappiness (malheur) carried me away with enthusiasm. I think I inherited this from my mother whose Spanish soul was at the same time so flaming and so shadowed. And Christianity's main attraction for me has been the vastness of Christ's sorrows, the magnificent, the transcendental horror of His Passion."(1)

Later on, in 1891, he wrote to the same lady, who had by that time become his wife:

"I am the second of a family of seven boys, and I have been as you know, a horribly unhappy child, less by reason of the systematic hardness of my parents, whom I pray God to bless in His eternity, than by reason of my exceptional nature, which makes me unfit for the acceptance of ordinary necessities. I suffered for six whole years as one very youthfully damned from the yelling abuse of my brothers. In that respect my suffering was just like Joseph's, for the simple reason that I was not made an object of worship. And that is the literal truth:

(1) Lettres à sa Fiancée (Tr. fr. Léon Bloy: Pilgrim of the Absolute pp.34-35.

explain it as you will. The cries of my small brothers resounded like mad thunderbolts in the sonorous caverns of my young soul. And since that distant time, the cries of little children create on me an impression which renews all the agonies of my childhood. I would be a fool if I attempted to explain to you what is for me a most mysterious affair. You are perhaps the only woman fitted to understand me. I pray you, therefore, not to grieve on my behalf, but to look upon me in the light."(1)

Letters like these, and references of a similar character afford just the excuse required for other attempts at psychologizing the unhappy youth, who certainly appeared queer, even to those who knew him and loved him. Thus, Ernest Seillière finds in his whole life and work symptoms of pathological megalomania.(2) This commentator enlarges on the claims made by Bloy to have received, ~~through the medium of~~ Anne-Marie(3) a unique revelation, exclusive to himself. He arrogated to himself a prophetic rôle in the new scheme of Salvation which was to assume some mysterious form or other of the Second Coming. It was not only a superiority-complex that plagued poor Bloy's mentality, according to Seillière's psycho-analysis; it was a God-complex. For, associating himself, in the early years of his religious life, with the Deity, he latterly identified himself altogether with that august Reality. Jesus Christ was le Pauvre, and Bloy voluntarily became le pauvre too: so that sometimes it is a little difficult to make out which was which. This effort at psychological diagnosis, again superficially understandable, is even more

(1) L'Ame de Léon Bloy pp.30-31.

(2) See Léon Bloy: Psychologie d'un Mystique by E Seillière.

(3) See Part II Ch.4 Véronique.

preposterous than that of Paul Jury's. For, in spite of all his chronic wretchedness and the magnitude of his deprivations, Léon Bloy kept a level head and was in full possession of his remarkable faculties until the day he died in his seventy-second year. Traces of persecution-mania and delusions of grandeur, which the superficial eye might find in his work were not at all the symptoms for which a psychiatrist could prescribe. The forty odd books he wrote are no mad-house wherein we see the distracted antics of a lunatic. Much rather are they a Temple wherein we behold a great sinner wrestling with the living God, until in adoration he falls before the altar of the Holy of Holies, the much bruised, long-tried, yet obedient servant of the Absolute.

Now, if we are to obey Bloy's injunction to his wife and see him "in the light"(1), we are driven to the conclusion that the influence of his mother went far towards building up the main pillars of the religious Absolute, the superstructure of which dominated all his life and thought. That pillar is succinctly described in a letter to one of his friends when the Catholic writer was well advanced in years:

"Dear Philip," he wrote, "I am going to tell you the greatest secret I know, the idea which has sustained me for a long time now. On all the occasions when a person is joyful - joyful in a spiritual or physical sense, there is somebody who has to pay." (2)

(1) See above.

(2) Letter to Philip Raoux in Le Vieux de la Montagne p.182.

Here, then, is abundant proof that the 'portentous bargain' made between his mother and the Almighty, whereby she was to suffer the loss of everything, including her health and strength, in return for the conversion of that son of hers who stood most in need of conversion, was the outstanding incident of Bloy's childhood, which riveted itself on the sensitive tablets of his mind. That mystical experience of his mother's sheds a revealing light not only on the mysterious grandeur of his sufferings, but also on the interpretation he put upon them.

Voluntary suffering as the payment for spiritual blessings, therefore, became the accepted dogma of this man of the Absolute. As he tells his sweetheart in one of his letters:

"Although I was as near as possible to despair, I thought, as I always do on such occasions, that I have an enormous debt to pay which I must acquit to the last mite, and when that is done I shall at last have peace; and, while waiting, I am sure that I will not perish, whatever dangers may beset me. This unshakeable belief is the foundation of my hope, and it has always upheld me,"(1)

Again he tells her:

"God, who knows us perfectly, hears our prayers and gives us not what we ask but what we need. This fact ought to be the principle of all Christian resignation. I asked Him to let me suffer for my friends and for Him, both in body and in soul. (Present writer's italics). But I had envisaged noble and pure suffering which, as now I see, would only have been another form of joy. I had never dreamed of this infernal suffering that He has sent me and that has consisted in His seeming withdrawal from me in leaving me defenceless in the midst of my cruellest enemies. When I made myself responsible for the agonising being whom I have called Veronika, I thought my prayers had been heard because I suffered daily anguish through extreme poverty while I was supporting this glorious vessel.(2) But at the same time

(1) Letters to his Fiancée (Engl. Tr.) p.22

(2) See Part II Ch.4 Véronique.

I had revelations such as angels might well have envied. So it was not real suffering. But when God took away what He had done me the honour to give me, then I knew what it was to be really unhappy.

Imagine a superb bird which is accustomed to soar in the blue sky and under the burning rays of the sun, and which suddenly has its wings cut off and is shut up in a dark cellar where it has to crawl about among the most disgusting reptiles!"(1)

"Human beings," is his conclusion, "have only worth just according to their capacity for suffering voluntarily."(2)

These are no arm-chair teachings. They sprang from the depth of the bitter experiences which made his entire pilgrimage a living sorrow. That sorrow was borne patiently in the belief that all his sufferings for himself and other people were recognised by God as an acceptable method of payment. Here, for example, is a somewhat pathetic entry in his Diary:

"Resolution - not to smoke - I offer for the soul of a dead man this custom, this craving of thirty-five years.

(I do not believe it to be possible to carry through a harder penance. This huge effort has aged me. After six years I am suffering for it still. I was always a smoker, even a passionate smoker: still, I have not smoked a cigarette for more than two thousand days." Dec. 1903.) (3)

Bloy even carries this idea of 'commercial' suffering into his relationship with his fiancée herself. Thus he assures her:

If I have got to be unhappy, very unhappy for a long time yet... so much the better for you. It is necessary to pay your debt. When we receive a divine grace, we ought to realise that someone has paid for it on our behalf. Such is the law. God is infinitely good, but at the same time is infinitely just; and, as such an infinitely rigorous creditor. About fifteen years ago, when you were still a small girl, I spent months beseeching God, in prayers that resembled tempests that He should make me suffer so that my

(1) Letters to his Fiancée (Engl. Tr.) p.147

(2) Ibid p.29

(3) Mon Journal Vol.1. p.86.

friends, my brothers, and all the souls unknown to me who lived in darkness, should receive help; and I assure you, my love, that my prayers were granted in a terrible way."(1)

The whole conception of vicarious suffering being equivalent to spiritual payment, however, led Bloy on to elaborate a theory of money, which though germane to his own over-arching idea of the Absolute, has got precious little to do with text-book principles of mundane finance. It will require a separate chapter of our study.(2)

The present chapter, then, which has taken us into many odd corners of a precarious and sorrowful career, is meant to illustrate how the peculiar trials of an unhappy childhood and the dominant influences of the Périgueux home affected the after-development of Léon Bloy's sensitive and deeply turbulent soul.

Though, undoubtedly, there is material of an exceptionally intriguing character to provide grist for the psychological mill in Bloy's fascinating temperament and mentality, we have been at pains, in this part of our study, to defend the validitys of the writer's religious convictions against some of the derogatory speculations of his (would-be) psychoanalysts.

(1) Letters to his Fiancée (Engl. Tr.) p.61

(2) See Part III Ch.3. The Economy of the Absolute
(A) Spiritual Commerce

CHAPTER 2 CONVERSION

In quite a number of his writings Léon Bloy attributes his religious conversion to Barbey d'Aurevilly. For example, in a letter to the Abbé Angers, written in March, 1882, he says:

"There, my dearest abbé, you have the sweet, serene sentiments that were in me when I got to know M.d'Aurevilly. He pierced through the mastodon of pride with a swift arrow and pinned me like a barn-owl over the shining door-way of Jesus Christ."(1)

Then, in a letter to Dame Maria X, written in February 1869, he states:

"...Moreover, by an incredible favour of Providence I have come into terms of intimate friendship with a man of the first order, the greatest Catholic writer of our time, the Tertullian of the nineteenth century, if my sentiments are of any value. This magnanimous spirit has conceived a lively attachment for me and has treated me like a spoilt child. After snatching me from the fundamental atheism in which I wallowed when first I knew him, and making a Christian of me, he plunged me into theological science in which he excels - and which, indeed, is the first of the sciences, since it embraces all the rest..."(2)

To many people the immediate cause of Bloy's return to the Catholic Faith when he was a young man just about twenty, may appear strange. For d'Aurevilly, though a professing Christian himself, was by no means built in the mould of the apostles. According to Hubert Colleye it was almost a miracle that the author of Une Vieille Maitresse was the instrument of Bloy's conversion. As he says:

"Nevertheless God, for His adorable ends, makes use of instruments which are least subtle and most inept."(3)

Bollery, however, finds a more natural solution to the problem

(1) L'Ame de Léon Bloy p.53

(2) Léon Bloy (Essai de biographie) Vol.1. pp.86-87.

(3) L'Ame de Léon Bloy p.58

in his excellent study of the Catholic writer:

"We have seen," he remarks, "that Léon Bloy's resistance to maternal influence and entreaties sprang above all from the childish pride which made him take for independence of character his habit of persisting in the absurdest whims, even though such ran counter to his liveliest aspirations, forcing him to pay for the same with the worst of catastrophies. Barbey d'Aurevilly was the amiable pretext and seducer who satisfied young Léon Bloy's vanity and made him adore in him (Barbey) the very things which previously he had thrown to the flames. But," adds Bollery, "the real, patient and suffering artisan of what, for lack of another word we may call his conversion, was his mother." (1)

Our last chapter on Bloy's youth will demonstrate how heartily we concur in Bollery's verdict.

But though Barbey, the traditional Catholic and polished man of letters was the instrument chosen to turn the course of our author's life, his art, good enough in itself, was never able to sound the depth of Léon Bloy's soul. To be sure that is not altogether surprising, for careful scrutiny of that same soul, as it is 'concealed' in his multifarious works proves that more than ordinary measuring-lines are required to explore the depths of such a gulf.

It will be remembered that in trembling awe Deutero-Isaiah says: "Verily Thou art a God that hidest Thyself!" (2) And Bloy is ever on his knees before the Mystery of that Godhead. He never attempts to 'explain' that mystery. His whole ambition is to awaken in the hearts of his readers the feeling of awe and what Otto calls the 'sense of the Numinous' before the Majesty and Holiness of that Supreme Being. (3) We get no cut-and-dried, clear as crystal

(1) Léon Bloy (Essai de biographie) pp.95-96

(2) Isaiah 45.15

(3) See R. Otto's Idea of the Holy Tr. by J.W. Harvey.

religious platitudes from this mighty river. He is no 'babbling brook'. The more one studies him, the more one is impressed by the depth and grandeur of what might be termed the 'metaphysical implications of the Absolute' in which he lived and moved and had his being.

Curiously enough, we touch here upon one characteristic which is strikingly similar to that of the late Scottish playwright, James Bridie. In the editorial of January 30, 1951, The Scotsman says:

"He (Bridie) often left his audience not, as do so many dramatists, in the state of having seen all there was to see and thinking it precious little in the end, but questioning and asking for more. It was not dissatisfaction with what they had been given, but the sense that there was much more implied. That was the inimitable flavour of a Bridie play."

To the charge that the dramatist was incapable of writing a good third act, Bridie made the typical reply: "Only God can write last acts, and He seldom does." He often sought inspiration for his work in the Bible and the Apocrypha and was obsessed with the mystery of human life, both in its macabre and whimsical aspects. Nobody can doubt that the Scot was more obviously full of the milk of human kindness than the sorrowful Bloy, but at the same time we can never rise from reading the latter's novels or his diary without feeling that we have been brought to the threshold of an infinite Mystery, while behind that threshold there still lie mysteries upon mysteries waiting to be revealed. We have good

grounds for believing that this 'flavour' is a mark of the greatness both of Bridie and of Bloy.

One can detect a Bunyan-like trait in the 'terror' that haunted Bloy's soul at his conversion. This 'terror' never seemed to leave him: it was a perpetual fire which gave his imagination no rest. For him it was a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the Living God. His mission in life, now, was to call upon his soul and the souls of all who would listen to him to flee from the Wrath to come. Unlike his friend d'Aurevilly, his was not a nature that could be satisfied with a conventional form of Christianity. As he wrote to a priest not long after his spiritual upheaval:

"I am now penetrated through and through by the divine truths which you ministers of God expound. That ought to calm my heart and spirit. And yet, when I look into myself, I find no more tranquillity than in the days of hatred and revolt. My anguish now runs in a straight line. That's all. I have learnt to know myself: I have a better view of my soul's distress. But along with that I have been given terror, and it is a dreadful gain. A speculative Catholicism cannot satisfy me. My fiery soul demands an ardent practice."(1)

Again he says:

"There is nothing True except what is Absolute. The Ideal is martyrdom, and when a person has on his head the supernatural aureole of Faith, it is a diadem; and to wear it worthily requires the strength of a Virgin, the sinlessness of a priest and the holiness of a patriarch."(2)

Writing about the same time to a priest, he says:

"When one has reached man's estate, and has accepted in principle any particular truth, the implications of that truth should likewise be accepted. When a man has decided upon a certain course, and is neither an imbecile nor a coward he should pursue the same to the end, or else renounce the

(1) Léon Bloy: A Study in Impatience p.38

(2) Léon Bloy (Essai de biographie) Vol.1. p.115

undertaking at the very beginning. Valiant hearts do nothing by halves. They do not split truths, taking here and leaving there: they accept them in their entirety and remain faithful to them till death and beyond the grave... A semi-rascal rightly inspires with a certain pity, for error is an abuse of truth, but the phrase a 'semi-Christian' or a 'semi-honest man' has no meaning, for here we are dealing with 'absolutes'."(1)

Later on, when he had a family of his own, he was to give to the person who asked what he was training his children for, the monumental answer: "For martyrdom."

Something truly apocalyptic in intensity must have convulsed a soul which could say, on looking back upon his spiritual condition before 1870:

There was a time - it was just before the Commune - when hatred of Jesus and His Church became the sole thoughts of my mind and the sole feeling of my heart. It was the most intense and burning passion in me, one of the supernaturally deep passions which seem to be of the very essence of the soul."(2)

To express the fierce suddenness of the spiritual revolution that overtook him, Bloy makes use of such figures as 'fire', 'conflagration', 'furnace' &c. Probably the most powerful of these expressions is contained in the account of Léopold's conversion in La Femme Pauvre:

"Léopold, blessed by the priest, juxta ritum sanctae Matris Ecclesiae, had been visited in all his senses, ~~as with the oil of~~ anointment: upon his cruel eyes, which had not beheld the Face of Pardon; upon his unheeding ears, which had not heard the groan of the Holy Spirit; upon his savage nostrils, which had not inhaled the fragrance of the Divine Will; upon the tomb of his mouth, which had not eaten the Bread of Life; upon his violent hands, which had not helped to carry the Cross of the Lord; upon his impatient feet, which had gone everywhere except towards the Holy Sepulchre.

The word conversion, so debased in any case did not adequately express his catastrophe. Someone stronger than he had seized him

(1) Léon Bloy: the Pauper Prophet p.14

(2) Léon Bloy: A Study in Impatience p.35.

by the throat and had carried him into a house of fire. His soul had been torn out of him and his bones crushed; he had been played, trepanned, burnt; he had been reduced to putty - a kind of clayey substance, which had been kneaded into shape again by a Workman, gentle and light. Then he had been thrown head first into an old confessional, the boards of which creaked beneath his weight. And all that happened in a single instant."(1)

So, with a mighty leap Léon Bloy flung himself without reserve of any kind into the bosom of the Absolute. From that spiritual springboard he was literally driven to learn Latin, with the express purpose of mastering his Vulgate Bible; and for two unbroken years he immersed himself in Biblical, Patristic and mystical lore. For an ardent, impetuous spirit like le désespéré, it was all or nothing.

Now, as with ^{the} Apostle Paul, so also in the case of Léon Bloy there was a deep thought-content which rendered significant the the emotional explosion that rent his soul. Dean Inge, whose pungent sayings contain a great deal of truth, remarks in Diary of a Dean:

St Paul's 1911-1934:

"In England and I think in other countries too, almost all serious thinking on theology is done by laymen."

The account of Bloy's conversion as found in Le Désespéré furnishes us with a splendid confirmation of this truth:

"Marchenoir had browsed through the New Testament for the first time as he idly warmed his feet by night while on guard duty in 1870. It was then that he experienced the immediate, blinding intuition of a divine Revelation.

He always recalled the distracting anxiety, the superhuman bewilderment of that eagle-winged moment which raised him in a whirlwind of uninterpretable delight. He was lifted up in the embrace of the novel sensation of some unknown energy, his arteries beating and his heart aflame, intoxicated with certainty, shaken with the whirl of a hope mingled with anxious care and ready for all that a martyr might be willing to suffer. This

(1) La Femme Pauvre pp.289-290 O.C. (Tr. fr. Léon Bloy: A Study in Impatience pp.36-37.)

intuitive and synthetically ardent soul, overleaping all intermediary lessons of the Faith, was swept away at the first blow to the conclusive conception of immolation.

The concept seemed to him to emerge from one of those rare dreams with clear-cut contours which gives the impression of some sensible vision of Conscience reflexly manifested in the excessively lucid intussusception of sleeping people. He was convinced he had appeared to himself, unimaginably transmuted so as to resemble himself all the more: yet horrible, dripping with abominations and sad beyond any hyperbole.

This impression coincided pretty well with the terrifying scrutinies of Hell and the paralysing frightfulness of the Irrevocable, which is so excruciatingly experienced by certain mystics. The reading of such mystics already of long standing, had left on his memory burns of enthusiasm, as it were, and bruises of poetry...

A double abyss opened in front of this being, dating from that portentous instant - an abyss of desire and of fury which nothing was ever again to fill. Here Glory essential and inaccessible: there, the waves of a human swinishness that went on all the time. There yawned an infinite chasm between the two sides: a simultaneous failure of Love and of Justice. It was Hell, without anything to counterbalance it: nothing but Hell!

Christianity gave him its word of honour of a blessed Eternity, but at what a price! He understood it now, this strange hunger for suffering that had been his all through his childhood. It was all the foreboding of the fearful Countenance of the Judge on that impossible erection labelled with the Tetragrammaton.

Wretches continue to be tortured and to die, and have done so for two thousand years, before this inexorable enigma of the Promise of the Kingdom of God, that must always be asked for and which never puts in an appearance. 'When these things begin to take place,' it is written, 'know that your Redemption draweth nigh.' And how many hundreds of millions of human beings have suffered life and death without having seen anything begin at all! Marchenoir used to ponder over this uplifting of innumerable arms supplicating perpetually with a prayer that was perpetually unanswered, and he came to the understanding that just here was the mightiest of all miracles. 'Here,' he thought, 'we have nineteen centuries of that kind of thing going on: this supplication with no answer to it from a Father who reigns in terra, and who frees. The human race must be terribly persevering not to be tired long since and not to have lapsed utterly to the bottom of the pit of absolute despair!'

He fished up with the conditional despair that men might have had supposing they had lived to be a thousand years of age.

He had felt Love pass him by, a love that was spiritual and absolute. He had, like other folk, shed his heart out in this faithless sieve of the Lord's Prayer...and he had been saturated with perfect joy...There was something, then, under this heap of graves, under the Maladetta of hearts suffering in the dust at the bottom of that gulf of the silence of the Almighty - some principle of resurrection, of justice, of future triumph! By dint of loving faith he made for himself an awesome eternity out of a handful of time which he kneaded in his hand, and forged for himself a hope from the bitterest pessimism.

He persuaded himself that we are dealing with a Lord God who was voluntarily emasculate, unfruitful by decree, tied, nailed, expiring in the uncrustable reality of His Essence, as He had been symbolically and visibly in the bloody adventure of His Hypostasis.

He had the intuition of a kind of Divine Impotence, provisionally agreed upon between Mercy and Justice, in view of some ineffable recuperation of a Substance that had been wasted by Love.

An unearthly situation it was, which might well call forth a dialect of its own to give expression to the abject nakedness of it all. Threefold Reason may suspend its payments for a good few centuries, and human Patience may fittingly help it out of its own funds. For only in the process of Time must the Master of Eternity make the problem solvent: and time is part and parcel of man's desolation. That is why saints and Doctors of the Faith have always taught the necessity of suffering for God.

The ardent neophyte, having got to the bottom of these things, plucked the thorn from his lame foot of a tardily acquired Catholicism and - hurling himself upon suffering - made a sword out of it, which he plunged into his bowels, after having staved in his eyes.

More than ever he became a victim of despair, but one of those sublime victims who fling their hearts into the sky, as a shipwrecked sailor throws all his fortune into the ocean, so as not to sink altogether before having at least caught a glimpse of the shore.

Moreover, he considered that the catastrophe of the time-honoured and tragical farce of Man was directly at hand. Certain

astonishing ideas, which came to him on the subject of universal history - and which he developed to their most extreme consequences - made him conjecture with an exegetical authority that was well-nigh prophetic, the imminent fulfilment of the scriptural prophecies of doom.

The exaltation of the humble, the wiping away of all tears, the blessedness of the poor and the accursed, the precedence accorded to thieves in Paradise and the regal coronation of prostitutes; in short, this advent of a liberating Paraclete, that had been so solemnly predicted - all that the fratricidal deafness of the convict-keepers of Tradition had spewed forth, all that prevents orphans and captives from dying with horror - well, he refused to believe it possible that people should have to wait for all that any longer: and he stated his reasons.

But only those dying of hunger were in the secret: not because he was afraid that he would be judged ridiculous or insane - as far as that went, he had for long nothing either to win or to lose - but through sheer horror at the intestinal satiety of the fortunate gourmands who might give him a hearing.

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Such, then, was Marchennoir's doctrine - a doctrine which by no means separated him from Catholicism, since the Roman Church permits everything that does not interfere with the canonical Creed of Nicea. Notwithstanding, it is reckoned singularly audacious by sellers of celestial counters who hawk their sorry wares on the dirty pavements of men's consciences."(1)

A passage like this will convey far better than any comment how profound was the reorientation wrought in Bloy's abysmally hungry soul. Like the Psalmist of old he had cried:

"As the hart panteth after the water-brooks, so panteth my soul after Thee O God. My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God."(2)

And the ocean depth of the Christian Revelation, in all its amazing majesty came forth to meet the famishing deep of a nature which only the Absolute could satisfy. 'Deep' had called unto 'deep', and the conversion marked the first bout of an

(1)

Le Désespéré pp. 44-47

(2) Psalm 42.1.

agonising struggle which was to continue throughout his earthly pilgrimage. If ever there was a wrestler with Christ it was Léon Bloy.

Rayner Heppenstall seems to detect a suspicion of heresy in the account of Bloy's interior illumination which we have translated from Le Désespéré. Marchenoir, himself, of course, admits that his doctrine is 'singularly audacious'. But when Heppenstall attributes a sentence like 'He had the intuition of a kind of Divine Impotence, agreed upon provisionally between Mercy and Justice, in view of some ineffable recuperation of a Substance wasted by love', to a species of Manicheism, 'which condemns the natural order as evil in itself',⁽¹⁾ we would beg to register a gentle protest. As the title of Heppenstall's book suggests - The Double Image (Subtitle: Mutations of Christian mythology in the work of Four Catholic writers of to-day and yesterday), the argument throughout seeks to prove that the dramatic imagery, or the mythology of the artists' creative faculty, often runs counter to the traditional mythology of the Christian Faith.

"..The truth of the matter is," says this critic, "that the creative imagination, dealing with experience according to its own laws, makes discoveries which the praying, the believing soul does not acknowledge."⁽²⁾

We make bold to say, however, that Rayner Heppenstall's critical net is no more adequate to catch the profundity of Bloy's religious thought than was that of Barbey d'Aurevilly's. The writer of The Double Image has apparently read Le Salut par les Juifs, but with all due respect for his literary acumen, he certainly does not

(1) The Double Image p.28

(2) Ibid p.27

seem to have plumbed the deep significance of that wonderful multum in parvo treatise, which goes to the very root of all Bloy's thinking. Le Salut, indeed, amounts almost to a metaphysically elaborated exposition, (based exegetically(1) on the scriptures), of the sentence quoted above. Evidently Heppenstall's rather cavalier treatment of Bloy's two novels tends to place him among the 'romantics', who, according to Marcel Moré,

"have used and abused Satanic thoughts, without seeing in them anything else save symbols susceptible of dramatising a wholly subjective idea of evil, without attributing to them any theological reality."(2)

Far from there being any 'double image' springing respectively from the myth of the Christian Faith and the myth of the artist's creative imagination, this sentence about the provisional contract between Mercy and Justice, which is to lead on to 'the ineffable recuperation of a Substance wasted by Love', is but the one identical image which is rooted and grounded in Bloy's deepest religious convictions. Certainly it was the Catholic writer's imaginative faculty which gave form to the figure, but there was a complete identity à propos the image of faith and the image of artistic expression. Furthermore, sincere minds baffled with the enigma of those apparent irreconcilables Mercy and Justice in their 'struggle' in this vale of tears, might well be grateful to Bloy for his helpful suggestion which is eminently agreeable to the Christian spirit. This, and many other paradoxical forms of expression sprang directly from Bloy's amazingly comprehensive insight into the morally tragic consequences which Man's Fall brought upon him. When he fell from grace, it was not his own soul

(1) i.e., the type of allegorical exegesis der.fr. abbé de Moidrey.

(2) Résurrection: Léon Bloy p.41

alone that was involved. He drew the whole of creation with him into the same state of corruption and death. The entire course of history and the temporal process itself could be explained in terms of this provisional truce between Mercy and Justice, which was to continue until such time as Redemption had carried out its perfect work and restored the whole of a corrupt Creation to its primordial glory. Then will come the consummation, when, as Unamuno says, "Everything that has existed in time will be eternalised." (1) This is the doctrine of ἀποκαταστάσις, found in the first epistle to the Corinthians, where St Paul tells us that

"the last enemy that shall be destroyed is death, for He hath put all things under His feet. But when He saith all things are put under Him, it is manifest that He is excepted which did put all things under Him. And when all things shall be subdued unto Him that put all things under Him, that God may be all in all."

ἵνα ἡ ὁ Θεὸς πάντα ἐν πάντιν (2)

Indeed, this 'recuperation of a Substance wasted by Love' is nothing short of the 'consciousness' taught by Unamuno in, perhaps his greatest book, The Tragic Sense of Life. After expounding Paul's doctrine of apocatastasis and linking it up with that of anacephalosis, (the summing up of all things in Christ) he goes on to say:

"And does not this apocatastasis, this humanization or divinization of all things, do away with matter? But if matter, which is the principle of individuation, the scholastic matter, principium individuationis, is once done away with, does not everything return to pure consciousness, which in its purity neither knows itself nor is it anything that can be perceived or felt..." (3)

(1) The Tragic Sense of Life p.253

(2) 1 Cor. 15.26-28

(3) The Tragic Sense of Life p.242

The Spanish thinker seems to be expressing here the same thought that was being born in the struggle of Bloy's soul. With the former's training in philosophical thought, a time is looked forward to, when everything would 'return to pure consciousness.' Bloy's guess of 'the ineffable recuperation of a substance wasted by Love' gives expression to a similar idea: but his titanic wrestling enables him to fathom in the depth of his own soul something of the amazing spiritual agony which such 'pure consciousness' was going to cost.

Quite remarkable confirmation of the similarity of these two writers' thought is found in one of the earliest letters to Georges Landry, dated 1st September 1871, which for some reason or other is not included in the volume Lettres de Jeunesse.

Here Bloy writes:

"...The universal Mean, the mediating Being by whom alone we can know God and man, our Lord Jesus Christ is precisely the man of sorrows, Vir dolorum, spoken of by Isaiah, mightiest of all the prophets. Now Jesus Christ, Word incarnate, God made man, is man spiritualised, even in His flesh. He is the infinite Christian, man absolutely, ecce homo: and as Saint Gregory of Nazianza expresses so well: 'He is God made man for love of us, so that we may become divine through love of Him.' Everything then, hangs together: all the truths are linked together in a wonderful order, and if our spiritual divinization is the infallible result of the compensating miracle of God made man, the divinity of the Redeemer implies for us, as an invincible consequence, the inexorable necessity of being, in our turn, men, and furthermore, men of sorrow.

Let us sum the matter up. Supernatural Love, that incomprehensible infusion of God into us by grace, through which alone we can understand supreme truth and obtain possession of it: in short, supernatural Charity is precisely the fruit which hangs upon the ignominious gallows of the man who must draw all men unto Himself and bring all things to a head in His own self.

Now Charity revealed in Jesus Christ made man, is what has been confounded by men and corrected in a divine, primitive sense, showing forth the heart of Man absolutely: for it seems to me that the Word is not only incarnated in Mary, but in us all, since He has dwelt among us and since we are His members. It is therefore Love made man so that we become all love. But if this transformation of our disorderliness in love is the fruit of supreme love, and disorderly divinity (If I dare say so without blasphemy) in its utter infinitude, with the purpose of adjusting itself to our besmirched eyes; then it is abundantly right and necessary that the disorderliness of our nature subsist in this world where it simply had to be, so that we could draw from it, one day, the very thing that supreme Love was all the time abasing."

Commenting on this part of the letter, we may say that we have a somewhat different approach here of the ^{na}apocrophalosis of Christ. Emphasis throughout is laid rather on the sufferings of the Man of Sorrows. Again, the term 'love' seems to take the place of Unamuno's 'consciousness'. Nevertheless, Bloy does appear to be striving to give utterance to quite a remarkable parallel of the philosophical ideas contained in The Tragic Sense of Life.

Continuing the next part of his letter, he describes how Christians, as members of the Body of Christ, can bear their part in the 'summing up' by taking upon themselves the divine burden of suffering:

"Resuming the argument. Man who does not know Jesus Christ, that is, carnal and lustful man who is imprisoned in the barren contemplation of effects, is just the man who cannot help being in all places where supernatural doctrine does not exist. But wherever the supernatural doctrine of the Son of God holds sway, sufficing grace makes man accept of it and superabundant grace makes him desire supernatural practices, that is to say, suffering: for that is all of the supernatural that we have here on earth below - SUFFERING.

The rest is human. There is in every Christian man, a man of suffering, and that is God; the other part of man is only a contingent figure, a deceiving phantom of blood and dirt which the sun withers and the wind scatters across the furrows of the earth.

But do we need so many words to establish something which is so clear? We are the people who continue the work of Jesus Christ, since we are His members, and our duty is to prolong His sacrifice on earth until it is entirely consummated. Once again, we are, according to the profound language of Scripture, His MEMBERS. Now, here we have the society which God Most High, in His wisdom gave to His well-beloved Son in this world: a society marked first of all with perfect Poverty, continuous and absolute, then with perfect Disgrace, continuous and absolute: in short, perfect Suffering, continuous and absolute. Such was the society which Christ chose on earth, so that He could demonstrate the kind of things He preferred, which were to be endured even to death itself. In so far as He was man, it was by this way that He ascended into Heaven: and this is the road the soul must take in its journey to God; for there is no other right road to go. It is fitting and seemly that the way chosen by the members should be that first chosen by the Head. 'O religious souls', says Saint Francis of Sales, 'think shame to call yourselves members of Jesus Christ if you do not desire to suffer with Jesus Christ, for it is too great an effrontery to see delicate and sensual members under a head that is crowned with thorns.'

Suffering willingly received is always supernatural and it has always supernatural consequences. Every time we begin Calvary again, we also begin Redemption: our sufferings are always redeeming someone or something, and for that reason it is a great crime not to have patience...."(1)

It seems incredible that such a Christian metaphysic of suffering could have come from a young man of twenty-five years of age. Yet practically all the letters which he wrote to Landry are marked with the same spiritual precocity. As far as we can fathom the profundity of Bloy's thought, he seems to be saying that the Fall threw the whole Universe off its balance, morally and spiritually. The only way that it could be restored to its equilibrium was at the cost of infinite suffering. This process of restoration or

(1) Léon Bloy: (Essai de biographie) Vol.1. pp.149-150

redemption has been radically initiated by the sorrows and sufferings of Jesus Christ, and especially by His Cross. But Jesus Christ has not ceased from suffering. As Pascal says, 'He is suffering till the end of the world.' This suffering Saviour is man absolutely, spiritualised man in the dispensation of Redemption wherein we stand. He suffered to an infinite degree. Bloy tells us in another letter, which we shall presently be examining, that throughout Christ's earthly life He was continually experiencing the past, present and the future in a simultaneous manner. That was really the reason why He had the capacity to suffer in such an extraordinary fashion.

The grim object-lesson of his mother suffering voluntarily to achieve the conversion of her wayward boy would never be very far away from our author's mind as he elaborated his doctrine of suffering.

Furthermore, according to the Catholic thinker, who was himself a man of sorrows to a superlative degree, this species of redemptive suffering is the only supernatural element that exists in the world. Everything else is simply human. Bloy even goes so far as to identify this suffering with God Himself. His argument seems to be that by an infusion of grace the Christian is lifted out of the natural species of homo sapiens, and belongs now to a different order of anthropology. This is the redemptive species, marked by vicarious suffering which is destined, in God's own time, to bring back the universe to its pristine harmony and balance.

For the distorting of the fair, sinless universe originally created by God involved the Deity in the strange exploit of the Incarnation and the Crucifixion. To introduce the redeeming love which was to restore all things to their primordial purity and perfection, the Godhead required to resort to the twisting or disordering of His own divinity, in a manner of speaking, so that Love could accommodate itself to a disorderliness in our own nature and in the world, with a view, ultimately, of bringing about an enhanced orderliness after all the sin and misery, resulting from the Fall, had been atoned for by Love's infinitely redemptive suffering. (1)

This full-orbed metaphysic of suffering throws a great deal of light on the furious sense of impatience that marked all Bloy's life and work. Possessing an ever-alert intuition of the continuous nature of the sufferings of the Man of Sorrows, he was impatiently eager to do all in his power to bear pain and suffering with the supreme end in view of cutting short the time when Jesus would have to suffer any more. Naturally, when he saw so many of his fellow-Christians, who, lazy and indifferent, cared little or nothing for his still-suffering Redeemer, his impatience and righteous anger knew no bounds. With such a keen sensibility, coupled with his poetic imagination, it is a little easier for us to understand the excesses of his unmitigated violence. It is only an eye scanning the surface of things that finds in these bouts of irascibility elements of moral weakness which tend to

(1) This part of Bloy's teaching has been wonderfully epitomized in Alexander Whyte's great statement;

"Penitence is better than Innocence".

disfigure the sublimity of his religious thought.

The truth is that the more we read Bloy, the more we are convinced that his thinking and his experiencing are all of a piece. One may liken the matter to a deeply moving river in a rocky gully. The cross-currents of the stream create dangerous whirlpools. Spectators merely see the peril of being caught in the vortex. But scientists who have an expert knowledge of the river-bed and the flow of the water, are cognizant of the conditions which had brought about the gyratory motion of the water, and would indeed have been surprised if the vortices did not appear on the surface of the stream. Similarly, the 'ugly' excesses of Léon Bloy's violence would tend to dismay the uninitiated. But when one has knowledge of the inner stresses and strains of the immense volume of the 'Absolute' that this man's soul had to carry, the comprehending eye sympathetically marks these outbursts of vehemence as the perfectly natural phenomena of a character that is both deep and complex.

It will be seen, then, that unlike many an evangelical conversion, there was very little joy attached to the emotional eruption which moved so mightily in the soul of Léon Bloy. There was rather a deeper initiation into the meaning of suffering. This crucial spiritual experience which d'Aurevilly was the means of inaugurating (though not, as we have seen, generating) was to show Bloy how many things he was to suffer for the name of the Lord, just as Paul's experience had done on the Damascus Road.(1)

(1) See Acts 9.16.

Looking back on the awakening that had come to him, and pondering over all that it had taught him of the significance of his tribulations, he writes to his friend Georges Landry that great letter in which he evloves his whole doctrine of suffering:

Pérgueux.

25th April, 1873

"...Alas! How few of all human creatures alive in the world have a soul deep enough to know how suffering spiritualises afflictions. Vulgar souls think that tenderness of heart, that priceless treasure of life, is like a coin which only clicks in enchanted palaces, to the brilliant effigy of magnificence and good fortune. I know nothing which is at the same time so false and perfectly stupid! Precisely the contrary is the truth. A book written by a genius would be needed to establish the truth, and a very common truth it is, that it is necessary to have suffered in order to be capable of loving. Love is an act of will, but suffering is always a revelation, lighting up that act, because in his poor heart man has places which do not yet exist, and suffering enters in order to bring them to life."

This phrase, which Bloy has underlined, is one of the great thoughts that never could have been brought to birth save through suffering of a nature both intense and prolonged. Not many youngsters in their twenties have the maturity to utter such a gem of mystical insight. Continuing his letter, he says:

"Hence martyrdom, that is to say, the complete acceptance of all possible pain, precipitates the soul in one moment into perfect love, without having to undergo the toilsome initiation of penance. We have all seen this in the history of the saints, and we have more or less understood. But it is quite evident that here God is not doing everything in a supernatural manner, but following laws essentially human. In faith! How grandly one can dilate on the subject of suffering, if one views it in metaphysical terms! Personally, I never stop thinking over the matter, and the more I meditate on that great inexorable necessity of our hearts, encountered everywhere, 'the dumb, tearful statue, ever before him', the more I find it beautiful, well-doing, holy and divine. This is the diamond key with which I

have entered my own heart: it is that holy veil imprinted with the bleeding Face of our crucified Saviour, so wondrously gentle. We know that the stars are always in the same place in the firmament; but varying with the state of the atmosphere, they sometimes appear much further off than at other times. Sometimes they appear much nearer and resemble tears of light ready to fall upon the earth. So it is with God. Joy makes Him appear far distant, while affliction brings Him nearer to us, so that He seems to make His abode within us. Where afflictions fall upon us, we feel instinctively their relationship with the favours that went before them, in much the same way as temptations have often in them the suggestion which recalls for us former victories. They come, one after the other, knocking repeatedly on our poor hearts with so modest and celestial a mien, that beneath their transparent disguise, it is easy to recognise that they are, in truth, angels. A heart without tribulation is like a world without revelation: it sees God in the feeble glow of twilight. Our hearts are filled with angels when they are full of tribulations."

Digressing for a moment, it is interesting to note the marked similarity between the ideas Bloy is expressing here and those of Maeterlinck the Belgian mystic. One could almost be reading the latter's Inner Beauty. We can well understand the affinity between those two poetic souls: an affinity which prompted Maeterlinck to write to Bloy nearly quarter of a century afterwards:

"Monsieur, I have just read La Femme Pauvre. It is, I believe the only work of this day in which there are evident marks of genius, if by genius we understand certain flashes in the depths which link what is seen to what is not seen, and what is not yet understood to what will be understood one day. From the purely human point of view one is involuntarily reminded of King Lear, and nothing else comparable can be found in any literature. I beg you to believe, dear sir, in my deep admiration.

Maurice Maeterlinck" (1)

(1) Mon Journal Vol.1. p.29

Returning, now, to Bloy's letter where we had broken off, he continues his soliloquy on suffering in the following manner:

"I recall having read that excellent saying of Father Faber's: 'On Calvary a few million souls in the arms of Mary found how good it was to have a broken heart; for the bruising of their heart made them see God.' Holy suffering, I bless you. You should be called a liberator, a mother who is strong and attentive. I have no wish that creatures should part me from you and give me consolation when you are not there. Moreover, I am well aware that there is genuine consolation, deeply hidden it is true, but yet within our reach, in thus denying ourselves all human consolation. When the darkness of nature overtakes us, it is then we find ourselves close to the Master. When dear ones are absent, my gentle friend, we are palpably upheld in the embrace of the creator. For creatures carry an atmosphere which dulls our sensibilities whenever they appear on the scene. Through that tenderness which they inspire in us they cramp us, coming as they do between us and Grace. Hiding God from us and depriving us of spiritual consolation, they leave us weary and irritable. They so fill our outward senses that our inner senses are incapable of functioning.

We often wish our life to be more divine. Yet in reality, it is more so than we believe. Suffering reveals that to us. Suffering seals us within God's will as in a tomb, shrouding us like the winding-sheet of deep night: it gradually contracts our horizon and the vast universe grows less before our eyes. It shrinks still further: first one object disappears then another: we become less and less subject to distraction. Our inner life is more freshly awake. Our soul grows strong. And now we are upon Calvary...The line of darkness has touched Jerusalem itself. The very consolations of the Spiritual City have disappeared. The helmets of the soldiers scarcely throw a last reflection upon the dark background. The green of the mountains becomes black. For a moment we are blinded. Then, by degrees, the white form of Jesus takes shape against the background of deep darkness. His blood flows warm on our hands when we seize the Cross, for it is not an apparition: it is Life. We are with God our Creator, our Saviour. He is wholly ours, He was always in that place of His, always the same in our souls: only He was eclipsed by the false brightness of creatures. He appears at last in the night like the stars. The pale moon at midday does not seduce by her beauty. It is only at night that she charms us. Similarly, it is the darkness of a spiritual Calvary which sheds upon our souls the gentle radiance of our wondrous Saviour...

It scarcely ever happens to us...that we should get hold of all the present simultaneously. In everything that happens to us what is implicit always transcends what is expressed. It is what we mean when we speak of a growing pain. It is not the Pain which grows: it is the appreciation we give to it, and this progress depends on the imperfection of our spirits. That is why we often appear more heroic than we really are. We only bear the part of our burden which we see, and we see only a fraction. Our Heavenly Father makes it fall upon us gradually, sharing the weight between His own hand and our shoulders, so that we get used to supporting the whole pressure without being crushed. We never travel so quickly as the present moment by our intelligence or by our sentiment. That is why our sufferings are for the most part less painful to bear than they seem: for we bear them by degrees, almost without our knowledge. Do you know how Jesus Christ suffered so much? I am going to try to give you, in two words, a most uncommon point of view. It was because all through His life-time there was in His soul a perfect identity of the present, the past and the future. That is particularly striking in the agony of the Garden of Olives. But what a gulf that opens up before us!..."(1)

In dealing with this crucial point of Bloy's pilgrimage, for which it is rather difficult to find a suitable name (since conversion, illumination, initiation into sainthood and a dazzling progress in mystical maturity are all telescoped together in a most amazing manner) it has been thought wise to make as careful a selection as possible from the letters he wrote in the years immediately succeeding his vital return to the Christian religion which he attributes to Barbey d'Aurevilly. By this method we get, so to speak, Bloy's own 'post-mortem' report on the religious orientation which transformed his soul. That something of uncommon proportions had happened with almost lightning rapidity in the soul of Léon Bloy, nobody can well deny. But it took the new-born Catholic many years; indeed, one may say the rest of his

(1) Lettres de Jeunesse pp.54-61.

life, to try to give utterance to what did take place. It is not every day that such a burden of the 'Absolute' is placed with such staggering intensity upon any human spirit. But then, it is not every day that we are called upon to behold hidden depths in our own soul which are brought to light as we ponder over the wrestlings of this mighty giant.

CHAPTER 3

DESPAIR

Obviously this sombre characteristic of Bloy's life is not confined to any one period, either before or after conversion. If it is a landmark, it is some vast Dungeon of Despair which never leaves the landscape of Marchennoir's pilgrimage, from whatever angle it is viewed. It is a trait which is constitutional and temperamental, colouring all his religious experience, and giving it that searching profundity that opens our eyes to the depths in our own souls as well as in the soul of the author. This despair is precisely the badge that marks Léon Bloy as the denizen of the modern world and not - though he constantly would have us believe it - as a man of the Middle Ages who has somehow stumbled into the nineteenth century. For Bloy does not strike us at all as a man who is endeavouring to flog the dead horse of an age-old past. He is the contemporary of neither St Bernard nor of St Thomas. Though he himself would not willingly admit it, he speaks more with the voice of Pascal than of the mediaeval saints. His problem no longer rises from his reason alone. Arguments for the existence of God and the similar happy hunting-grounds which scholastic theologians explored held no attractions for him. For Le Désespéré was an autobiographical novel which was written not only with pen and ink, but with flesh and blood and mental and spiritual anguish such as is given to few writers to express. As he says in his preface to Mon Journal:

"Every earthly resource seems to have gone by the board.

Never mind! I am compelled to cry aloud to the very end, since I am set apart to Witness. I cannot get away from it...If you want to know, that is the secret of my literary existence. Every one of my books is a CONFESSION torn from me by sheer torture. In that way

my executioners got hold of Le Désespéré, Sueur de Sang and all the others without exception. Take La Femme Pauvre; it alone has necessitated the breaking in of several altogether unlikely corners with mallet-blows. To-day I am old and bruised, and death itself will be sweet after such a life."(1)

Similarly, he writes in his first novel:

"...He (Marchenoir) took a hammer to drive this question into his inner self, down even to the bursting of his very heart, but no reply was forthcoming."(2)

Words like these could have come from a Baudelaire or a Dostoievsky or a Nietzsche, for they, and not the scholastics were the genuine contemporaries of Bloy. These were the men who had tasted the bitterness and anguish of existence. They had plumbed the depth of a despair unknown to and unsuspected by the consciousness of the men of the Middle Ages.

Then, after the 'failure' of that novel (Le Désespéré) he wrote to a correspondent:

"You speak truly when you say that Léon Bloy is ignored and at war with all the powers that be. And why is this?... Because he loves Justice above all else, because he is not afraid to voice unpalatable truths, and because he has tried single-handed to start a new current of literature in France, a literature which aims at glorifying Christian spirituality in opposition to those potentates of Journalism who strive to brutalise and dishonour this generous nature. These men have basely avenged themselves by shutting all their doors against him, thus depriving him of the means of gaining his bread by his pen and striving to condemn him to silence. The wretched man is forced to spend every hour of the day searching for the bare necessities of life, thus losing the precious time which should be used uniquely in literary production."(3)

It is some compensation to the genius of Bloy to know that to-day bibliophiles clamour for first editions of a work which

(1) Mon Journal Vol.1. p.x

(2) Le Désespéré p.99.

(3) From Léon Bloy: the Pauper Prophet pp.27-28

has been acclaimed one of the peaks of twentieth century literature. But that does not prevent us from recalling Dr Johnson's all-too-true sentiments:

See nations, slowly wise and meanly just
To buried merit raise the tardy bust.(1)

Yet, to have the moral courage to triumph over the despair induced by such persistent disappointments, in the unshakeable conviction that he was writing for posterity and not for the passing moment, meant not only the enrichment of French literature to an incalculable degree, but furnishes us also with unimpeachable evidence as to the stubborn heroism of an unusually great soul.

The following picture of Bloy's existence in Paris over a period of some sixteen to eighteen years is found in a letter he wrote to his friend Mme Charles Hayem. It provides an excellent commentary of the indomitable wrestler's struggle with Despair, whom he calls the King of monsters who had honoured him with his constant company: (2)

"Ah," he writes, "how long this chronic suffering endures: and yet apart from a tiny number of superior souls, who can possibly understand it all?...A wretchedness that can never be thrown off is but the padlock which binds my faculties. That, and nothing else! Some folks, wishing me well, often upbraid me for not being like other people, content to graze on the accepted acorn-patch. Alas! It has not been for lack of good will. Judge for yourself: I tried business some fifteen years ago and became a library-clerk. Well! I attempted to dissuade people from buying the stupid novels that were abounding without succeeding in convincing them of the excellence of the few rare books I recommended.

Here I am, then, unfitted for anything that a person can do on this earth. I cannot be brought within the frame of any

- (1) The Vanity of Human Wishes
(2) See Le Désespéré p.146

social group. Journalism, which should have been the means of my livelihood is strictly closed to me by this very good reason that I am not able to write four lines without compromising the equilibrium of the planet. Thrown out by the Catholics who cannot forgive me for being an enthusiast, and a high-coloured one at that, an object of disgust to the non-Catholics, who cannot digest my Catholicism, and always exterminated in advance by the impossibility of becoming acclimatised in this world, deprived of fortune and with no resource of any kind, I came into touch with spiritual tribulations, the actual magnitude of which can only be measured by Him who knows our capacity for suffering."(1)

When Léon Bloy, greatly daring, embarked upon the seas of matrimony at forty-three years of age, it was certainly not because his struggle with Despair had receded into the background. Indeed, with his additional family responsibilities the combat became all the grimmer and more nerve-racking. It became so devastating that it cost him the lives of both the sons whom his beloved Jeanne bore to him. One of his reviewers, referring to this circumstance, wrote:

"...Two of his children died of something rather worse than poverty, that is, of mediocrity."

Answering this critic, Mme Bloy said:

"I am so grateful to you for telling me why our two children died. Ah yes; the mediocrity of this world killed them. Of what other death could the children of Léon Bloy die?"(2)

Something of the pathos which surrounded the passing of the first of these children might be gathered from the narrative relating the death of the infant Lazarre in La Femme Pauvre.(3)

Then in L'Invendable he tells us:

"...Our little Madeleine has no longer any bed, and sleeps on the floor: on two good enough mattresses, it is true, and well enough covered, but on the floor! - a thing we have never

(1) Léon Bloy: Édition du centenaire p.172

(2) Letters to his Fiancee (Introduction)

(3) See La Femme Pauvre pp.223-225 Tr. fr. Léon Bloy: Pilgrim of the Absolute
pp.171-175

experienced before, even in our worst days, and it gives us strange tremors at the heart. Where is God going to bring us? I have no underwear, nor any clothes for that matter. (One of the few rather better books I have produced, Quatre Ans de Captivité was written, I believe, when I had neither socks nor trousers to put on.) (1)

Again, in his Diary we read:

"... Since Wednesday my days and nights have been spent in nursing my dear wife, and in looking after the little ones; seeing to their bottles, their clothes and a thousand other things of which I have no experience. - I am penniless, so full of anxiety that I am unable to sleep. I am, moreover, deprived of my Daily Communion, without which life for me is unbearable. I am, indeed, God's anvil in the depth of the abyss: yet I know that it is His love for me that allows all this to happen.

And, after all, the bottom of the abyss makes quite a good spring-board to leap into His arms." (2)

Yes; there can be no doubt that the material distress of Léon Bloy was far worse than any that afflicted Job experienced. In abject destitution at the time of his sojourn in the Trappist Monastery, it was necessary when someone wrote to him to insert a stamp in the envelope if any reply was required.

"Voluntary poverty is still a luxury," he cried in Le Désespéré, and consequently it is not real poverty, which everybody loathes. It is assuredly possible to become poor, but only on condition that the will is entirely uncoerced. St Francis of Assisi was a lover and not a poor man." (3)

This shows us that it was enforced poverty with its paralysing frustration which gave Bloy the horrifying sensation of Satanic power. It is not easy to forget the impression that was left on the present writer during his student days in the time of the Great Depression, when a young unemployed miner, during a discussion on the economic situation, cried out with passionate bitterness: "With money you can do anything: without money you cannot live." An abyss of experienced Hell was in that voice.

(1) L'Invendable p.49

(2) From Léon Bloy: the Pauper Prophet p.44

(3) Le Désespéré p.338.

No finer recruiting-sergeant for the ranks of Communism could have been employed than the dismal era of the Depression. So far as Job was concerned, when the Lord said to Satan: "Behold, all that he hath is in thy power," He spoke about the prosperity promised to the righteous in the Old Testament. That prosperity was to be denied His faithful servant. But the cases of the miner and of Bloy are tragic in a different way. What Satan sought to take away from both of them was the very minimum of money without which it seems that not only the material life but the spiritual life as well, cannot be assured. The unspeakable wretchedness with which the Ungrateful Beggar betook himself to such fearful extremities to keep his own and his dear ones' body and soul together, is revealed in his Diaries over and over again.

But it would be giving an entirely false view of the underlying horror of Bloy's despair, if we were to imagine that it sprang merely from his struggle with the material necessities of life. Those symptoms were only epideictic of the real inner despair which was consuming him all the time. For the life of this mystic was lived far more in his own interior world of the Absolute than in the world of sense and time. We recall the graphic description of his conversion in Le Désespéré when he pondered over the tantalising enigma of the Lord's Prayer, with all the hundreds of thousands of supplicating hands uplifted for the coming of a heavenly kingdom, which persistently refused to make its appearance for nineteen hundred years.

(1) Job 1.12.

"...He finished up," he tells us, "with the conditional despair that men would have had supposing they had lived to be a thousand **years** of age." (Il conclut au conditionnel désespoir des millénaires.) (1)

Yet, although Léon Bloy had to descend to the very bottom of despair's abyss, there was no trace of that mental instability about him which poisoned the mind of a Nietzsche. He was infinitely far removed from the insane act of a man who throws himself into the water. Nietzsche's despair was negative and pessimistic. It forced itself to whistle bombastically to keep its courage up. Nevertheless, it was fundamentally diseased at heart for it had no solid basis in theistic faith. Bloy's despair was positive and metaphysically optimistic. His introspection was only superficially morbid: deep down it was of a soul-cleansing quality, for it was unshakeably based in a religious metaphysic which satisfied his being in all its wholeness. As Colleye says:

"Bloy analysed himself with the clarity of a confessor or a doctor before a soul." (2)

Here is a specimen of his faculty of introspection which qualified him for the name of Le Désespéré:

"In my whole soul there is only one thing continually present: horror. A horror of everything; horror of myself; horror of the world; horror of creation; horror of one's whole life. I am tortured by this all-absorbing thought: what is to be done so that I may not fall into despair? I am reduced to forming syllogisms to persuade myself that there is no reason why I should be wholly lost. And I don't convince myself at all. I am not mad. I know: I know most distinctly that I am suffering, not from mental, but from moral disease. I can pass judgment on myself pretty fairly. There is no question here of a perversion or a slight weakening of understanding, but of a horrible poisoning of feelings. I have to force myself not to be unbearable to the world; I only appear sullen: and this result

(1) Le Désespéré p.45

(2) L'Ame de Léon Bloy p.223.

of my interior struggle is a kind of miracle. I am poisoned psychologically. Something black and noxious has fallen into my heart, like ink into a stream. When I laugh at a joke that is more or less clever, and when I try to return the joke in a way that indicates that I still have a sense of humour, even then, my friend, at that very moment, I think of death, of the terror of judgment, of eternal despair, of the fearful responsibility of every man, and of the disgrace of my own life. All this is perpetually lying in front of my eyes like a company of demons around my soul. It constitutes a moral torture whose enormity I cannot get you to understand...I can assure you that very often, even when I laugh and when I appear to interest myself in what is round about me, I have great difficulty in restraining myself from howling like a madman and running into the middle of the streets."(1)

Undoubtedly, the man who wrote this passage must have felt at an abysmally low ebb, but nowhere can we trace any sign that he has thrown in his hand and supinely abdicated all hope. He is still fighting against hope. Though he may be 'poisoned psychologically', a divine alchemy converts the poison into a thorough rinse, albeit a painful rinse, for a consciously corrupted soul. The trouble with so many of us is that our souls are unquestionably corrupt, and yet we are 'sublimely?' unconscious of our deplorable condition. Since we do not know, we think 'tis folly to be wise.' A despair like Bloy's is but the vestibule to the palace of sainthood. So few of us reach the palace because so few of us ever enter the vestibule!

Often readers of Le Désespéré, intrigued with the despair therein unfolded, mistake its true character. This certainly was the case when a group of désespérés wanted to start a review and asked Bloy for a title to it and also to be a contributor to

(1) L'Ame de Léon Bloy pp.223-224.

its pages. There is an amusing correspondence on this subject in Le Mendiant Ingrat, and the author of Despair's classic is compelled to dissociate himself from the despair of his would-be collaborators in the following terms:

"...One thing, only, scares me and that is the pessimism with which you acknowledge yourselves inflicted. If you are pessimists - a thing that seems to give the lie to the rest of your message - you have come to the wrong door. It is Huysmans to whom you should speak.

There is nothing in the world which I detest so much as pessimism, which represents immediately, to the horror of my mind, all imaginable impotencies: impotency of spirit, of will, of heart, of the loins and of the stomach. If I had the honour of being a commander in time of war, I would have the pessimists shot as I would have spies and deserters shot.

In my estimation only a measureless courage is worth the candle, and I will never accept defeat - never!"(1)

Evidently the impotency of a knock-kneed despair had as little attraction for the superb diarist as the hardihood of an overweening self-confidence.

Bloy, however, does make an effort to show us the kind of despair Le Désespéré is meant to convey in a letter he wrote to M. Boussin, a journalist of Toulons on May 16, 1886, just as he was completing his novel:

"...This will be a book full of despair, like its author, but of philosophic despair, and not at all theological, because I want to be a Christian. In this horrible tail-end of the century, when there is every likelihood that all may be lost, I was filled with a longing to call aloud to God the veritable cry of dereliction and terror for the orphan multitude whom the Father gives the semblance of abandoning from the depth of His heaven, and who has no longer sufficient strength to die generously. The epigraph, moreover, tells enough of my thought on this conditional despair which only looks to the earth, spem contra spem." (2)

(1) Le Mendiant Ingrat Vol.1.p.54

(2) L'Ame de Léon Bloy p.276

Bloy's designation of his despair as 'philosophic' in contradistinction to 'theological' has surprised not a few of his commentators. Even such a deeply understanding critic as Marcel Moré finds it difficult, and is inclined to discredit Bloy's judgment on the matter. For, as Moré says, quoting Le Désespéré, Marchenoir had already told us of his

"ten years of unchaste apprenticeship in the latrines of philosophical scrutiny, when he was on the point of making stercoraceous vows," (1)

and he had then reached the point when he gave up the whole idealistic world of speculation and dialectic, and plunged head first into the concrete world of existence, a world which, though intractably atrocious was at least a living world. From that time the writer had turned his back on philosophy, and even one of his best friends, Jacques Maritain, found no little difficulty in persuading him to give some small attention to a few of the things which he (Maritain) had written. So, in the accepted sense of the term, Moré was perhaps right in finding nothing 'philosophic' in Bloy's despair.

Later on in his Diary, however, in an entry under 8.2.06, he gives a somewhat clearer definition of his meaning:

"Philosophic despair," he there says, "consists in expecting nothing from men and everything from God - Religious despair expects nothing from God." (2)

Undoubtedly there does seem to be some inconsistency in the use of language here, if we take this following passage from La Femme Pauvre at its face value:

(1) Le Désespéré p.44.

(2) L'Invendable p.164

"...Marchenoir's genuine despair is not at all this surge in the soul, this disgust of living which is insinuated in the philosopher's heart because the proofs for the existence of God leave him unconvinced; it proves itself like a horror from the living God blown for hours on end by Lucifer on the man who lives in the Christian world."(1)

Reading between the lines, however, there is only an apparent contradiction. Bloy certainly would have repudiated the philosophic despair which is being expressed by quite a number of the continental existentialist thinkers of the present day. That despair is wrung from religious scepticism and sometimes from sheer atheism. The brand of existentialism expressed by these philosophers stems from 'theological' or 'religious' despair which 'expects nothing from God.' Bloy, on the other hand, who 'wants to be a Christian', 'expects nothing from man and everything from God.' His despair is deeply grounded in his Christian faith in the living God. It is philosophic in the sense that though personally experienced in all its utter horror, Bloy takes upon himself the task of making it a representative de profundis on behalf of mankind itself.

Le Désespéré is a veritable cry of dereliction and terror for the orphan multitude whom 'the Father gives the semblance of abandoning from the depth of His heaven.' The first part of the novel describes the horrible vertigo of the nihilism in which he saw his contemporaries revolving and which was ultimately to end in the Nazi whirlpool of death and destruction. To express

(1) La Femme Pauvre p.91

such nihilism Bloy had to go as far as he could to bring out the 'religious' despair (all the worse because it was unconscious, or at least but dimly conscious) which gripped the contemporary world. But, having gone to the mouth of the pit, le désespéré has no intention of stepping over the precipice. He was not in the grip of 'religious' despair. His passionate desire was to save men from the abyss of godless despair, not by offering them the gentle slope of an easily climbed optimism(1) but by presenting them with an abyss of as frightful dimensions as the one from which he would save them - the abyss of 'conditional' despair.

Probably Carlyle's sentence, which Bloy quotes more than once in his books, gives some idea of this abyss:

"Despair carried far enough completes the circle and again becomes a hope ardent and fruitful."

Yet, not altogether. No matter how far you descend into the pit of 'religious' despair you will never be brought about to 'conditional' despair. Something of cataclysmic potency is required to make that radical transition. This is the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. In our study of Bloy's escape from the 'Irrevocable', we shall come back to this all-important aspect of his teaching.

Now there is nothing romantic about the despair which marks the life and thought of Léon Bloy. It is no literary pose, such

(1) One is reminded of the story of Baron von Hügel and the enthusiastic owner of an up-to-date factory. The latter told von Hügel of all he was doing to make his factory Christian. He spoke of the 'welfare system, the dining room, the dental clinic and the swimming pool.' But his composure was not a little disturbed when the Baron interrupted him saying: "My dear sir, you haven't begun to understand what Christianity is. Christianity is not refreshment bars and swimming pools - it is a soul in the presence of God."

as that assumed by many of the pale followers of Rousseau and Byron, who literally died of mal du siècle. Dostoievsky comes nearest to expressing the poignant anguish of the soul of humanity that is poised on the brink of a chasm of nothingness - God or matter? The secular spirit of the Renaissance and its aftermath seemed to have liquidated God altogether; and the Encyclopaedists had cynically registered His failure, setting up in His place the Rights of Man. But succeeding generations had, in time, registered the failure of man. Collapse after collapse had followed in quick succession. One had the feeling that man was abysmally alone on a planet where life was becoming chaotically impossible. Cain Marchenoir understood very well the theoretic background of the doubt that was gnawing at man's intellect. But 'practical' experience had suddenly come to corroborate the fearful justice of cerebral deductions. Therefore an insuperable gulf separates his despair from the literary despair of his immediate predecessors. Knowing his human heart better than the literary pedants, his unerring instinct, which brooked no denial, cried out in sheer desperation for the living God. His cry was the cry of blind Bartimaeus - "Jesus Thou Son of David, have mercy on me!"(1) That cri de coeur was abundantly answered. Still, in spite of the saving act of Christ on the Cross, Marchenoir seemed to see humanity left even more disabled than it had been two thousand years ago. But since there was no way of getting over the mystery

(1) Mark 10,47

of Jesus, he had henceforth to wait on God alone. Surely, he pondered, as he searched the scriptures, the time must be at hand for the new heavens and the new earth. All the boasted achievements of men must be condemned out of hand. They had committed the unpardonable sin, the sin against the Spirit, which is to do without God. God had replied to that with a burst of laughter.

"He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh:
The Lord shall have them in derision." (1)

That laugh had already resounded under the shadows of the tree of knowledge. Long ago it had been heard in the proud days of Babel. At the present day it is over our modern civilisation that it is sounding. But the clatter of machinery is smothering the noise of God's laugh. Marchenoir alone caught the sound of it. So he alone had to pass on the terrifying news to his fellows.

Was it any wonder that a chosen spirit like his should feast his soul daily on the God-given rations of despair? Were more of us to share his 'daily bread' of despair we would rise from the banquet strengthened, paradoxically enough, by a confidence that no human power can give.

The 'conditional' despair into which Bloy would introduce his fellow-men is by no means an attenuated form of 'religious' or 'theological' despair. On the contrary, it uncovers the soul of man to an anguish of more piercing intensity. The very fact that the living God is in this despair and that it is based four-square on the height and depth and length and breadth of the metaphysical Absolute which Christian Revelation lays bare before the eyes of

(1) Psalm 2.4.

the spirit, gives to the regenerate soul a keenness of sensitivity and a burning awareness, from which merely natural man is insulated. Few Christians since the mighty Pascal have been able to give such unforgettable utterance to the sombre grandeur of man's despair, as he stands, a frail creature precariously poised in the bosom of an all-enveloping infinitude, and gazes shudderingly upon the dread vision of a mysterious and unintelligible universe. What Dr. Harold Knight says of Pascal in an article in the Hibbert Journal can with equal justice be said of Léon Bloy:

"With superb literary and poetic power, Pascal expresses his anguish in the face of the Unknown and all its terrors. His ardent mind in its eager searching and its avidity for the absolute was well calculated to feel the horror of despair which seizes the Augustinian thinker when he realises the inescapable confines of human knowledge and the inherent flaw which vitiates it."(1)

Where Pascal would seem to have the advantage over Bloy would be in his insight into the post-Copernican universe which his keen scientific mind opened up to him. He had knowledge of all that the telescope and microscope could divulge (up to that time) and it was against that informed background that Pascal stood aghast before the immensity of the Mysterious Universe. Yet Augustine, as we shall discover, had moulded the mind of Bloy with as stern a conception of predestination (or the 'Irrevocable', as he would have preferred to call it) as ever dominated the mind of the greatest of the Jansenists. (2)

Indeed, time and time again as we read Bloy we are forcibly reminded that we have come across the same thought or a similar

(1) Relevance of Pascal: Hibbert Journal April 1950 p.284

(2) See Part III, Ch.1. of this work

insight in the writings of Pascal. There is certainly more facility of phrase in the earlier writer's mode of expression, couched as it is in a subtlety of language not unlike that of Bergson's. But for sheer rugged beauty of diction, which impresses the heart with a sense of awe and mystery, even the great Pascal has to yield pride of place to Léon Bloy. It is interesting to note that both those authors were held suspect by the Roman Church yet they both passionately sought to defend their undeviating loyalty to her authority.

Affinity of spirit between the two French religious thinkers - both laymen - is brought out in the following passage from Pascal, given in French in Dr Knight's above-mentioned article:

"Here then, is our real condition which makes us incapable of knowing with any certainty and keeps us absolutely in the dark. We are travelling over an immense area which is always uncertain and fluctuating...Most ardently do we desire a firm grounding and a basic foundation strong enough to build upon it a tower that is to reach up to infinity, but our whole basis creaks and the ground opens beneath us like an abyss."

This metaphysical insecurity fills man with a sense of his own wretchedness, which, in its turn induces despair. Such was the authentic despair of Léon Bloy. Furthermore, this despair of man who is but the feeblest of nature's reeds, but a thinking reed(1) is the distinguishing characteristic of the consciousness of modern man. Pascal was possibly the first, and certainly the greatest of the voices which gave utterance to the fearful burden of 'existential' despair. Since his day the cry has been echoed by prophetic voices all over the Western world, prominent among

(1) Pensées p.229

whom are Kierkegaard, Dostoievsky, Nietzsche, Heidegger, Jaspers, Gabriel Marcel and Sartre. These modern prophets do not speak in one united voice, though they have one thing in common. If we make use of a musical analogy, they all play on the key-board of 'metaphysical' or 'existential' despair; but the harmonies they draw from that key-board vary from the profound Christian faith of a Kierkegaard or Marcel to the cultured atheism of a Sartre. But of all the harmonies that have been extracted from that common key-board, none approximates so closely to that of the original master(1) than Léon Bloy's.

Both these thinkers made the leap into the Absolute which was decisive, complete and with no reservations whatsoever. The human spirit will always go out in admiration to the 'whole-hogger'; for there is in each of us so much of the temporising mood which induces us to trim our sails to the prevailing wind that happens to be blowing, that when we meet a man who has the courage to damn all the compromises and reservations by which frail, self-protective humanity regulates its life, and has the 'guts' to act with complete and unambiguous forthrightness of conduct according to the dictates of his own conscience, we simply cannot withhold from him that royal salute, accorded only to princes of a moral and spiritual realm, which only our own cowardice prevents us from entering. Blaise Pascal and Léon Bloy stand high in the ranks of a spiritual aristocracy like that.

(1) i.e. Pascal

Then again the utter horror of the despair that gripped them drove them both to make a metaphysical rehabilitation of their human lives with a scripturally founded edifice of the Christian Faith. Pascal and Bloy were, above all, men of the Bible. Despair also, was the motive spurring them to hold commerce with the living God of Abraham of Isaac and of Jacob. It was a fearful thing to fall into the hands of such a God. Here, indeed, was no abstract Deity occupying a neutral position as object for the ratiocinations of arm-chair philosophers. Those fearful searchers after the Truth had an ineffable scorn for the academic disinterestedness of bloodless philosophising. Like Bergson, though with a different purpose in mind, they both strove to unseat Reason as the infallible arbiter of human existence. The edifice of Christian Belief, which was their life-work, was something more than an Apologetic. For the two great Christian teachers were convinced that the best defence Christianity could have was a positive attack on man-soul with all the arms of Christ's unconquerable Evangel. It can be said of the author of Le Désespéré as well as of the author of Pensées that the deepest impression that is left on the mind of the reader is the burning sincerity of great souls who greatly believe. This impression is calculated to inspire faith in the hearts of men who are groping after the Light. Intensely in earnest, in season and out, to persuade the non-Christian of the efficacy of the

Faith in which they stand, these two enthusiasts are desperate men, aflame with the passion of a saving Evangel.

True, they are evangelists of somewhat different calibre. Pascal is the subtler psychologist. He has an extraordinary insight into the inmost recesses of the human heart and the incurable defects which limit and corrupt human understanding. As Dr Knight says:

"Pascal's method is to identify himself with the secret desires and fears of the 'libertin' whom he would convert. This method leads him to give a brutally searching exposure of what he calls la misère de l'homme sans Dieu, - a conception, the execution of which brings fully into play that piercingly realistic psychology of which he was master."(1)

Bloy, on the other hand, cannot lay much claim to be a psychologist of other people. Perhaps he is too much of an egoist for that. He has got too much to think about concerning the difficulties, the dangers and the problems of his own soul to have much time for the psychological analysis of the souls of other people. Yet, even in his own life-time he managed to secure not a few 'trophies of grace' to lay at the feet of his Redeemer. Probably a large part of his success lay in the fact that he was a consummate introspectionist. That he identified his own individual soul with the soul of man in general, is a guess that does not hazard too much. For he certainly lived and moved and had his being in the realm of souls. Witness, among a hundred other testimonies, one of his earliest letters to Georges Landry, dated September 14, 1872:

(1) Relevance of Pascal: Hibbert Journal April 1950 p.284

"...Ah! When I contemplate the double aspect of man! When I think that at the back of this wall of flesh there is a whole WORLD of souls, so different from that of bodies, a whole immortal hierarchy which possesses its Kings, its Aristocrats, its hereditary Magistracies - and that by divine right - its Soldiers, its Executioners, its People and its Rabble! and that the whole concern is governed under the eye of God by an infallible Realpolitik without anything ever becoming displaced and upsetting the primordial Order! Most people have not got much time to think of these things. Yet, one never knows!

When the human eye turns and endeavours to fathom these depths, it only then begins to catch sight of the divine linements of the supreme order, and modern irregularities come from what men have lost of this outlook. We have said it a hundred times. The only Education, the only Politics is that which has regard for Souls, because, in the problem of Man, man himself must not be kept out of the question...

Your soul is wonderfully beautiful, but beautiful with the indefinable and mysteriously powerful grace which is not characteristic of the Lily on its stem, but of the Lily in the Escu de France. Now don't laugh. You see, when the beauty of a soul is being discussed, one is sometimes liable to be picked up wrongly. It can be very beautiful in itself, and yet hardly so in respect of the Infinite, unless it follows the essential Dignity which is its law... You are a soul on fire. A most unusual rarity in this century. Nothing gets closer to the heart. It can only be guessed that a soul is great: its strength and the proportion of its strength is almost always kept in the dark. As for the soul's integral beauty - that is a spectacle for God alone, as He contemplates it from the barricades of His Infinity. Yet we soon recognise a soul by the kindling glow of our own heart whenever we draw near to the ardent, palpitating hearts of certain people. An intense flame consumes them with inextinguishable heat, and sets our own hearts alight. Such men are sometimes quite ordinary, judged by their other faculties, but that is of no importance if they are in possession of that quality which goes under the name of the royal and all-powerful faculty of love..."(1)

From what we know of Georges Landry, it cannot be said that Bloy gives an accurate estimate of his friend's inner consciousness. No doubt the deeply hungry soul of the (at this time) recently

(1) Lettres de Jeunesse pp.43-44.

converted Catholic would have liked his correspondent to have possessed a soul like the one he was depicting in his letter. But poor, ordinary, commonplace Landry just could not fill the bill. He was a decent enough sort, but he had no answering depth of soul to return to the abyss which was Léon Bloy. In the long run Bloy had to write him off as one of the great number of his associates who turned their backs upon him.

Nevertheless, French literature and mystical lore would have been seriously impoverished had this letter not been written. For Bloy's genius as an evangelist does not consist in any astonishingly accurate insight into the spiritual conditions of those whom he would convert. Pascal's psychological method was constitutionally banned for Bloy. But with his sublime mastery over the memorable phrase and arresting epigram, he was able to give utterance to the extraordinary vital experiences that were stirring in the depths of his own individual soul. Whether unconsciously or not, the soul of a truly great man becomes the soul of Man. A person, for example, who knows his Shakespeare or his Goethe or his Dostoievsky is not only conversant with the works of those geniuses, but he is able to understand his own soul and the soul of Man generally in an incomparably better way than if he had not studied the authors we have mentioned. We may say that in the last-quoted letter and elsewhere throughout his works, Léon Bloy was apostrophising his own soul when he was addressing the souls of his fellow-men. Yet that is not altogether a bad thing. Any dedicated preacher will

tell you that the more you get to know your own soul, the more you are qualified to speak to the souls of others. This was assuredly the natural bent followed by the author of La Femme Pauvre. No matter whether he spoke in his novels, in his diaries, in his letters or in his historical studies - all these were but the pulpits from which he carried on his ministries to the soul of man. One of the most remarkable books on psychoanalysis is entitled Modern Man in Search of a Soul. But if any overwrought mentality, poisoned by the 'acids of modernity' were seriously intent upon regaining his soul, it would not be Jung's masterpiece that one would recommend. It would be rather a course of sustained meditation on the soul of Léon Bloy, as it is unfolded in his manifold literary productions.

The wretchedness and greatness of man proclaimed by Pascal, opened up the world of post-Copernican modernity. What was this 'thinking reed' to do in the face of the metaphysical insecurity which took the bottom out of its world? A torch-light was needed to penetrate the darkness of such a fearful pit. This torch-light was naked, 'existential' despair. Ancient and pre-Copernican man, sitting secure in his parochial star-studded universe had no need of such a torch. Science had not yet put the telescope and the microscope into his hands. The mysterious vastness of the infinitely great and the corresponding minuteness of the infinitely small had not gripped his soul in its awesome terror.

(1) The phrase was first used, if memory serves aright, by Walter Lippmann not long after the first world war.

To-day, in our industrialised age, modern man has been too long impressed with the sense of his own greatness. A visitor from Mars would imagine that he was nothing but a clever devil playing about with the ingenious gadgets of the high-speed aeroplane or the hydrogen bomb. The time is ripe for man to remember that he is poised on the brink of an abyss of utter wretchedness, from which, humanly speaking, nothing can save him. The supreme need is for despair's penetrating flash to illumine the pit of human misery, showing us the chronic depth of our destitution, and pointing us to the only Mediator who can take man's personality in all its paltriness and in all its grandeur, and remould it after the fashion of His own divine image.

Pascal and Bloy are supremely the two Christians who can speak to the modern world. In their different ways they can both use the torch-light of despair with singular power and efficacy. If, therefore, we associate these two names and adapt the conclusion of Dr Knight's illuminating article on the "Relevance of Pascal", we would be strengthening rather than minimising the truth of his words:

"...In the profundity of their vision, they conceal nothing of the heights and depths, the splendours and miseries which characterise man, and point to the metaphysical background of his being. It is for this reason that they are both supremely relevant to the intellectual climate of an age which has witnessed the collapse of idealism and of a facile Hegelian rationalism. Pascal and Bloy are the exponents of a Christian realism, for the whole tendency of their apology is to show that Christianity alone, among the religions of the world has been adequate to interpret the mystery of good and evil, grandeur and littleness in man, and to satisfy his deepest longings by pointing the way to its

final solution."(1)

Yet, in spite of all that has been said, we have not touched the rock-bottom of the horrifying dread with which his despair inspired the soul of Léon Bloy. As this is the point which leads naturally to the doctrine of the 'Irrevocable', it can only be mentioned briefly in this chapter. When we come to deal with that stern religious 'existentialism'(2), we shall see how the implications of his despair are worked out in all their shuddering detail. Meantime, let us revert to the passage from La Femme Pauvre referred to above -

"Marchenoir's genuine despair...manifests itself like a horror from the living God, blown for hours on end by Lucifer on the man who lives in the Christian world."

This crucial excerpt contains the suggestion of a kind of 'Christian' Zoroastrianism. There seems to be an effective dualism at the back of Bloy's Absolute; yet that Absolute, Itself, is essentially monistic. This conception is fundamentally Hebraic in form and can be studied in the immortal story of the book of Job. There, the supreme power behind the universe is Jehovah; but Jehovah 'allows' Satan to affect His servant Job with the forces of evil. The belief expressed in Job is not metaphysical dualism, but a moral dualism which is germane to a metaphysical monism that has been à priori to the situation since the Fall. It was man's Fall from Grace that introduced a dichotomy in man's will. Primordially man lived and moved and had his being in God, and supremely in the loving will of God. Then came man's first disobedience to the will of his Maker. Unlike Zoroastrianism, this dogma does not presuppose the existence of evil in the world from all eternity. Yet, like

(1) Relevance of Pascal: Hibbert Journal April 1950 p.287

(2) See Part III, Ch.1.

Zoroastrianism there is a desperately real struggle going on all the time in the world between two spirits. Zoroaster has called the good spirit *Ormuzd* and the evil spirit *Ahriman*. *Ormuzd* is light and life and all that is pure and good and true in the ethical world. He stands for law and order. His antithesis is darkness, death, and all that is evil in the world. He stands for lawlessness, disorder and lies. Nevertheless, though an eternal cleavage between the forces of good and evil is postulated in Zoroastrianism, at the same time the ultimate triumph of the good spirit, which is an ethical demand of the religious consciousness, also seems to be an essential requirement of the ancient seer's revelation. The moral rigour of Zoroastrian teaching runs right through the works of Bloy. For it is the spiritual dynamism of Satan over the human soul that numbs his consciousness with paralysing horror. The palpable reality of these powers of evil shook the sensitive soul of the Catholic writer with that eerie sensation of despair which creeps over the mind when reading the macabre stories of an ~~E~~ Edgar Allan Poe, or the haunting suggestiveness of an Oscar Wilde. The sheer subtle potency of temptation appears to clothe it as an evil emanation proceeding from a Personal Spirit. It was this ever-present fear that he was 'up against a sinister personal adversary whose power over his personal freedom was practically limitless, and against whose cunning wiles he could only pit his frail sin-tainted human will, which reduced Léon Bloy to a despair that se^apers the tortured pages of his novels and diaries like a red-hot poker.

CHAPTER 4.

VERONIQUE.

The previous chapter has led us along the dark tortuous avenue in Bloy's life to the episode that marks the acme of its blackest despair. This was the dramatic encounter with Anne-Marie Roulé, the Véronique Cheminot of Le Désespéré. For a man of his ardent tempestuous nature it is not a little surprising that he had not been unduly shaken by the storms of carnal passion until he was almost thirty years of age. As he tells us in his autobiographical novel:

"Women did not appear in Marchenoir's life until the end of that first period, that is to say, until after the war and the decisive thrust to his soul which had suddenly brought him back to that religious feeling, the unknown tendencies of which he carried within him from his first day.

Before then he had been chaste after the manner of prisoners and sea-faring individuals who usually see nothing in love save a lustful indulgence in the darkness of some expensive haunt. A stoical tantalus so far as that kind of gross entertainment was concerned, he had resigned himself as best he could to the denial of such impurities. On the one hand, an absolute abstinence, and on the other hand, a most incredible timidity on the part of such a violent nature, guarded him even more effectively than religion itself, when Love appeared on the scene to soften his heart."(1)

Still, perhaps it was not so curious after all. For Bloy's conversion meant the turning of his whole eager, enthusiastic temperament to God and the Catholic Faith. That was the reason why Louis Veuillot was taken aback at the utter completeness of his renunciation from the world. Though a man of considerable faith himself, his business experience had taught him that he must bow to the compromising demands that the world made upon him. But

(1) Le Désespéré pp. 52-53

any attempt to encroach upon Bloy's religious integrity was resisted with scornful vehemence. "You are just too enthusiastic" (vibrant), Veuillot had said, and left him there. He might as well have said he was too soundly converted. The office-chief had to ask himself: "What am I to do with a man like this?" He gave the answer that was soon to be repeated by the whole world. Nothing could be done with an intractable individual like that. It was an insoluble problem. What could be done with a man who

"hurled himself upon God as upon a prey the moment God showed Himself - with all the rudimentary spontaneity of instinct"? (1)

These inhibitions, however, with which religion had so long barricaded his soul, in the long run proved dangerous to Bloy's natural development. When sex-love ultimately did touch his life at twenty-eight years of age, it roused him with all the fierce intensity of a young adolescent.

"At a single blow," he says, "without having gone through the sewer of intermediary lustful experiences, he found himself ready for love's irresistible passion. Everything that wretchedness and the defiant gestures of retractile pride had, up till then, suppressed, suddenly exploded: ignorance, simple modesty, stupid credulities, lyrical eruptions, dangerous feelings of compassion, the unexpected demand to rip his soul from top to bottom in the very act of sexual disturbance, in short the entire unshelling of a retarded and grandiloquent adolescence." (2)

So it was that

"Marchenoir experienced the ecstasies of love in questionable couches with lacerated conscience and hating himself in the very deed, like those dry-as-dust anchorites of ancient Egypt whom the spur of the flesh constrained sometimes to go and shake their mortified carcasses in unclean towns only to flee away forthwith, sated with horror." (3)

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- (1) Le Désespéré p. 53.
 (2) Ibid p. 54.
 (3) Ibid p. 54.

We can just imagine the bitter-sweet intoxication of poor Bloy, "torn to pieces by God and by women, broken-hearted by the perpetual fiasco of the heroic purity of which he had dreamed." (1)

Unmistakeably "he was born for despair. Christianity," he complains, "had disordered his life, cramming him - so late - with the famine of love's affliction, over and above the other famine." (2) (i.e. the famine for the Absolute.)

When sex-attraction did thrust its seductive influence into his heart, the Maginot-Line having at last been penetrated, it is only fair to insist that there was nothing tawdry or cheap in his attitude to the other sex. The reverse is the truth. There was always a religious, even a numinous element in all Bloy's dealings with women. He could never forget that the poor prostitute with whom he was making his bed was made in the image of God.

"Apart from a miracle", he says, "which God never wrought - ~~the~~ mystical Icarus with his melting wings - could he ever have the strength to escape from the giddy attraction which drew him towards the porcelain creatures shaped in the divine Likeness?" (3)

That was why his love was never separated from an immense pity.

"A surprising avidity of human tenderness was the immediate accompaniment of the supernatural longings of this virgin heart." (4)

Not long after his doubtful initiation into the mysteries of sexuality, Véronique made her entry into Bloy's autobiography:

"Véronique Cheminot, lately celebrated in the Latin Quarter under the expressive name of the Ventouse (5) was a splendid article, whose ten years, at least, of prostitution out of her twenty-five, had not been able to wither...

"The boulevard Saint-Michel had often enough witnessed this

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- (1) Le Désespéré P:54
(2) Ibid p.55
(3) Ibid p.55
(4) Ibid p.54
(5) i.e. The Cupping Glass.

bold, auburn-tressed lass who had the demeanour of carrying on her head all the fires she had kindled in the loins of juveniles from the schools." (1)

Bloy's first encounter with the fair enchantress is told in the pages of Le Désespéré in the following manner:

"This gloomy individual, so different from everybody else and who never spoke to anybody, was hugely intrigued by the gypsy who used to see him take his lunch habitually a few paces from her at a small café on the square of the Observatory. This was a rendez-vous where she picked up her information and dreamt of exercising her influence upon him.

The setting of the whole affair was on the vulgar side, as was but fitting, and is by no means worthy of finding a place in a narrative. Underneath his fanatic's mask, the man was essentially kind; but all that the girl could obtain from the coarse (supposed to be funny) remarks she made, were inanimate monosyllables uttered without even a look at her - as though drawn up by a pulley from the bottom of a well of silence.

Exasperated by such poor results, she said to him one day:

'Monsieur Marchenoir, I am in love with you and I want you. What about going to bed with me?'

'Madame,' replied the other with complete simplicity, 'I never lie down in any bed'. (2)

This unconventional beginning led to the revelation of the uncongenial circumstances in which the struggling author was placed, and the girl at once altered her tone and became filled with a compassionate desire to 'mother' the neglected stranger. So one incident led to another until in time the two castaways became inseparable.

The historical identity of Véronique need not delay us here. The story has been told by Colleye and Bollery in their biographies (3) and the details are not necessary for our

(1) Le Désespéré p.68

(2) Ibid p.70

(3) See L'Ame de Léon Bloy pp. 135-181 and
Léon Bloy (Essai de biographie) Vol.1.pp

particular study. We are only concerned with the extraordinary drama which this encounter opened up in Bloy's life. He managed to keep his relationship with Véronique a secret even from his closest friends such as Georges Landry and d'Aurevilly. As the adventure developed, however, he shared the secret with M. and Mme. Hello and with the abbé de Moidrey, who at that time, was thrown into most intimate contact with his fellow-pilgrim. Naturally, such a situation was equivocal in the extreme, and, as Le Désespéré brings out, landed both Bloy and his friends in embarrassing positions. He became so enamoured of the courtesan of the streets that he "withdrew her from public circulation"(1) so that she could be supported by himself, "not", as he says somewhat ruefully, "without sin." This created an impossible situation for a man who had not the wherewithal to support himself. Furthermore, an atmosphere of spiritual malignity, as he confided to Mme Hello, seemed to brood over the house in which his lady dwelt.

"It was so palpably haunted by the devil that I could have died of terror. Possibly a depraved taste for the supernatural drove me ceaselessly to return to the place."(2)

After a period, however, he suddenly made up his mind to terminate his physical relations with Véronique and bring the prostitute to the only One Who could heal her sin-sick soul and transform her life. He realised that to do the latter he must begin by showing the strictest continence. If, in the interests of the Kingdom, he was to achieve a victory over Véronique, he

(1) See Le Désespéré p.69

(2) L'Ame de Léon Bloy p.148.

had first of all to attain a victory over himself.

Unfortunately, by this time, such an expedient was by no means easy and was resented by the girl who thought that Bloy had lost his love for her. Then began that poignant, unusual love-duet in the sad streets of old Paris, accustomed as they were for centuries to human distress. As the author of Le Désespéré puts it:

"Then started that cohabitation, so woefully slandered, of two beings absolutely chaste - so perfectly united and yet at the same time so profoundly separate." (1)

All students of Bloy are unanimous in their verdict that the agonising experience as it was actually lived through and which is laid bare to us in Lettres à Véronique, published in 1936 by Jacques Maritain, was far more heart-rending than the account given in the narrative of Le Désespéré, though in all conscience it is poignant enough. In the following letter written to his beloved protégée on the 7th July 1877, the curtain is drawn upon the drama going on in their two unhappy souls:

"My dear child, I entreat you, be brave. You gave me no end of trouble this morning when I saw you weeping...You must believe me...that the sacrifice I am asking does not cost me as much as you.

Ah, my poor darling, if you only knew how much I suffer, you would have pity on me. You would weep with compassion for your poor friend, who wants to save you and is inclined to shoulder any burden with that end in view. Why shouldn't you put a bold face on it? Why shouldn't you make up your mind to things with firm determination? You told me this morning that you thought the thing impossible. But, my dear, the thing is not at all impossible; it is only difficult. With courage you will pull through all right. If you remain down in the dumps, my poor little one, what is going to come of you?

Would you really have the heart to go back on your paces now

(1) Le Désespéré p.72.

and begin your former life all over again? You surely wouldn't reduce me to despair, would you? You tell me that you love me. Well, then, for love of me do what I tell you. I pray you in the name of all that is most sacred. Think of the blessed Virgin who loves you and calls you like a poor lost lamb; think also of your own mother, who is rejoicing at the moment when you make your good resolutions. What you must do surely cannot be so very difficult! Nobody is preventing you from seeing me. I will see you often - every day, as a matter of fact, if you require it. Only trust me and have pity on me: I am so unhappy and want so much to be 'bucked up' and given a little comfort. The only thing demanded of you is that we are not to be seen together at your house. Let us obey cheerfully whatever it may cost us. The Holy Virgin will reward us.

Dearly beloved, I assure you that this Mother will never let you down. She will send you peace and courage if you ask her from the bottom of your heart. Tonight, when I come from the office I will go to Notre-Dame des Victoires and pray her to send you her help. For your sake I will offer her my tears - yes, my heart, my happiness and my life, if she will have them. I am making the sacrifice perfectly freely with the intention of saving you, that you may never again fall back into the evil from which I am doing my best to draw you. If God calls me to the life of the cloister, (Bloy was meditating his second retreat to La Trappe at this time) I will go with all my heart in the hope of supporting you from afar with my prayers. I am weeping now as I write, my poor little girl. What do you want me to do? What do you think is going to become of me unless you help me? Come, come, I beg you, once again pick up your spirit in prayer: ask and it shall be given you: yes more than you can even think, and joy over and above." (1)

Yet even after such a letter as that it was impossible for them to hold back the irresistible impulses of their natures, and once more they fell from grace. The situation was getting desperate: for their passionate love for each other remained the same as ever. Things got so bad that Bloy wrote to say that he could only see Véronique when they went to Church together.

It was at this time that they sought to find a solution to their problem in marriage. Negotiations anent the same were even opened up with Mlle de Kermarec (Anne-Marie's guardian)

(1) L'Ame de Léon Bloy pp. 152-153

through the good offices of abbé Tardif de Moidrey. But all to no purpose. Evidently this marriage was not written in heaven and could not be brought within the compass of the divine plan. Possibly the determining factor which banished the thought of matrimony from Bloy's mind was a kind of fastidious tabu, a physical revulsion against taking to the altar a woman who had consorted with so many men in her past. As we read in the novel:

"...he ended up by evoking an idea three times blacker than all the rest put together - a sort of flying toad of an idea which began to suck his very soul. His beloved had belonged to every Tom, Dick or Harry that came along, not at all by passionate longing, or even the beginning of passionate longing, as was certainly in his own case, but by the shared caress, possession and animal embrace.

As soon as this poisonous dirt touched him, the wretched lover fell upon it like a bison. He had a flashing vision of Véronique's past, a terribly concrete vision which was inexorably clear-cut. There was revealed to him, too, in the same flash, the imperial despotism of this new feeling which scourged him like scorpions from the first day, and the sheer childishness of all the former inveiglings of his liberty.

He saw in one terribly blinding stroke that what he had twice believed to be the extremity of his passion, was only a surprise of the senses in alliance with his imagination. Doubtless he had suffered from only having consorted with prostitutes, and those functions of self-relief had appeared to him many a time as a fate that was bitter indeed. He recalled some of those sinister hours he had had.. But, at any rate, he could still speak as a master and order the monster to leave him at peace." (1)

As for Véronique herself, she realised well enough the incongruity of such a match, and frowned upon it. As she says:

"A man like you must not marry a girl like me. I love you too much ever to consent to that. If you have the misfortune to crave for the rottenness which serves me for a body, I would pray God to heal you or deliver you from me." (2)

(1) Le Désespéré p.100
(2) Ibid pp.98-99

On his scanty wage from the Railway administration he found it more and more difficult to support his friend and keep out of debt. To eke things out Véronique had just started her former occupation as dressmaker, when she contracted eye-trouble to such an extent that she could no longer see clearly enough to carry on her work. A vain hope in those miserably wretched days was held out to Bloy for emigration abroad. Someone, a M. de Puyjalon, crossed his path and promised him a post as editor to a great Catholic newspaper he was going to establish in Quebec. At this point in his spiritual life, when he was burdened with the care of a soul and stimulated at the prospect of a career in Canada so congenial to his religious desires, he felt the need of immersing himself once more in the quiet, meditative atmosphere of the cloister. Thus he sought his discharge from the Railway firm and found refuge in a Trappist Monastery (Trappe de Soligny) without even consulting Anne-Marie. It was Bloy's intention, if nothing materialised over the Puyjalon project, never to depart from La Trappe. A few months of compulsory asceticism, however, proved too much for Bloy's lively, artistic temperament. He groaned: "I can never make an eternal prisoner of myself in La Trappe!" (1)

In one of his letters to Véronique, he writes:

"The longer I remain here, the less I feel the attraction of the religious life. And moreover, my dear, I am so much in love with you that I cannot renounce the world." (2)

- (1) L'Ame de Léon Bloy p.159.
(2) Ibid p.159.

Bloy was finding that a tiny bit of regimented asceticism was much harder to endure than a life-time of asceticism self-imposed by a free hand. We can be assured that it was with very mixed feelings that he put the famous question to Father Athenasius in Le Désespéré:

"Don't you think that this unexpected retreat is perhaps a stroke of Providence in that God was leading me all the time till I was brought to the Harbour-of-Grace, which is your house?" (1)

The Father Superior took two pages of Le Désespéré to make his reply, which he sums up neatly in the incisive statement:

"You are forty years of age, and you are in love!" (2)

No: the monastic life was not for Bloy. He certainly had gone to La Trappe with the express purpose of finding out for himself if that was God's intention for his life. As he writes to Landry:

"I have come here to put myself in God's hands. If He wants me to belong wholly to Himself, I dearly want to know; but I ask Him, without any presumption to let me know with certitude that He does indeed wish it." (3)

Apparently that was not God's way with Léon Bloy. He had been "chased" from the cloister just as he had been chased from the world. As Colleye suggests, the Christian name Cain, which he gives to Marchenoir, is a fearfully accurate designation of his whole personality as a man

"guilty of the blood of fools, of mediocre and cowardly creatures, whom God marks with a sign 'so that whoever finds him does not kill him.' For Bloy was to pass through hatred, scorn, falsehood and not die of it all. No one having the right to lay a hand on him, he was an object of execration to many, and still never ceased to subsist by means of a mysterious succour, which for him betokened the sign." (4)

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- (1) Le Désespéré p.93
(2) Ibid p.93
(3) L'Ame de Léon Bloy p.162
(4) Ibid p.163

When he left La Trappe and returned to Paris, it was to begin all over again the wretchedness of his existence. A letter to Mme Hello written in August 27, 1880, gives some indication of the life he lived:

"We were absolutely without any resources, and in addition I was compelled to hide everything from my friends. I could find no means of employment. In a word it was quite impossible, from the human point of view, not to be killed outright from sheer misery. Well! We were supported miraculously. There has always come to me for two years, now, by unexpected avenues and always as a consequence of prayer, means of help, admittedly very poor but sufficient to prolong this kind of life for both of us, means that were unknown to the whole world and not too approveable, according to the usual views of Christian prudence, yet so manifestly meant by God. But I must insist on this point that the means of assistance came in such a way as not to obstruct in the very least the travail of purification and expiation which God wanted to work in me through suffering: that is to say, they never lost their aspect of precarious uncertainty." (1)

In the course of these fateful months Bloy toiled laboriously to share his faith with the woman who had thus so mysteriously been taken into his life. They went regularly to mass together, studied the scriptures and made several pilgrimages to Antony where there was a special sanctuary dedicated to Saint Joseph. His eagerness for the conversion of the poor girl was but too successful, for once in September 1878, when they found themselves in the chapel of Sacre Coeur in Montmartre, she met her "Damascus road" when "the love of God burst upon her like a thunderbolt." (2) A radical transformation took place in the twinkling of an eye within the young woman's soul. The prostitute disappeared altogether and gave way to a mystic whose suffering equalled that of Bloy himself. This passion-flower, born of the mercy of Christ

(1) L'Ame de Léon Bloy pp.163-164.
(2) Ibid p.164.

and the tears of Bloy, was going to pay back a hundredfold all that she had received from her father in the spirit. She devoted herself passionately to prayer, spending even ten or eleven hours before the altar in supplication for the one who had nourished her to the life eternal. As Le Désespéré so pitifully reveals she even went the length of doing violence to God Himself in her effort to bring herself within His inscrutable designs. Thus, in what is possibly the most poignant scene in the book, Bloy, after a night of struggling with the demon of lust, finally 'gives in' and rushes through to Véronique's room. But immediately he is brought to his sober senses by the sight of the penitent girl kneeling before the crucifix in an attitude of tearful supplication. She had been praying and weeping all through the night.

"Then in a kind of transport, her mind becoming somewhat deranged, she began to hurl invectives against her God. Marchenoir overcome with terror, beheld the worst outbursts of his own blasphemy 'by love' exceeded by this artless girl whom he had dragged out of the dirt like a diamond from the miry clay, and whose paradoxical simplicities he had treasured up for two tears.

'Take everything Thou wouldst desire,' cried the almost delirious girl, 'except this iniquity which is a disgrace to Thee. Push me back again, if it is necessary, into the horrible pit whence he has taken me, and throw me at once into Thine everlasting hell. If Thou dost damn me I am at least sure that I will not gnash my teeth.'" (1)

Since her eye-sight left her she knew that she could fall back on no terrestrial help. She therefore gave herself up with whole-hearted zeal to the spiritual life. The unexampled wretchedness of those two devotees' existence became gilded with a divine glory all of its own. Those were the days when Bloy had "revelations"

(1) Le Désespéré p.309.

and celestial joys such as angels might well have envied."

Insight into the state of his mind at this stage of his life is given in a letter to Hello dated Wednesday of Holy Week 1880:

"I am little short of mad. I am altogether unsettled in my ideas and see myself borne along the current of your wishes with a violence so great that it has become impossible for me to think of anything else. I have a hunger and thirst so furious for the glory of God on earth that I count the days like a madman. Why so? you may ask. If I could write cries I would perhaps express a part of what I experience at this moment. Everything that is not this retribution of divine justice, or at least the hope of that retribution which is imminently impending gets on my nerves to the point of madness. At the same time I see the world going on always at the same pace and no sign is appearing. I drag myself to the feet of all the saints to ask their help, to supplicate them in the name of the Crucified to set me free, if indeed I am a prey to some illusion. Scarcely can I piece together any prayer: a mighty physical oppression speedily overcomes me and I fall asleep. That is my whole life." (1)

This condition of nervous excitability which amounted almost to religious mania was due to his close association with his simple-minded partner who had outstripped him in the Second-Adventist meditations at that time monopolising their thoughts. According to the lately blossomed prophetess they were approaching the last day which was to inaugurate the third dispensation of the Holy Ghost. Apparently Saint Joseph was the presiding genius of the events which were predicted to materialise within the space of days. But the feast of Saint Joseph came and passed by and still no sign illumined the horizon. The heavens were as brass. Bloy's impatience collapsed in an agony of divine blasphemy - all other expressions fall short in describing the climax of his letter to Hello on the 19th of April 1880:

(1) L'Âme de Léon Bloy pp.170-171.

"I am unhappy beyond all expression and understanding. I have been wounded in my faith, my hope, my love. Today, Monday, for the first time for I know not how long, I have not received the Sacrament and I have not uttered a prayer. I could find nothing in my heart but the most bitter and savage resentment against so hard and thankless a God. I have long given everything. In nearly all my prayers I have offered my body and my soul to the most horrible, the most diabolic tortures on condition that He for His part, would make Himself what He said He would be - my servant. With the help of His grace, nondoubt, but at the cost of sufferings of which you have no conception, and of which the mere recollection lacerates me, I accomplished in two years an unparalleled work of patience. Nobody would have believed that a man stripped of everything could dare to undertake such a task - and it was all for the glory of God. And in return everything is denied me. I should be ashamed to treat a mangy dog as God is treating me!" (1)

What a glorious rebel was Léon Bloy! He was out for the glory of God without a doubt, but it was to come in his way. He had yet to learn that it was God Who was Master: Master of time, of each passing moment, of the providential plan, of the choice of means, of prayer itself. That being the case, there were prayers which could not be answered. Even Bloy's impassioned petition had to go unanswered, for the hour had not yet come. This pride which presumed to use God "as a servant" had to be levelled to the dust. Marchenoir had to learn that man is nothing - less than nothing - while God is Lord over all. All those fearful months of the Véronique episode, he had wrestled with God in an agony of despair. Like Jacob his august prototype he had refused to let Him go until He had blessed him. And God did bless him, giving him strength to endure during his time of suffering and life-time vigil.

This was by no means, however, the supreme lesson of Christian resignation. It was only after thirty-five years of waiting amidst

(1) L'Ame de Léon Bloy p.175 Eng.Tr.fr. Léon Bloy: A Study in Impatience p.48.

incredible sufferings that Bloy, shortly before his death, learnt that lesson. Throughout all those years, as he confided to Jean de la Laurencie in January 1915:

"I have not done what God wanted of me, that's certain. Instead, I have mused over what I wanted of God, and here I am at sixty-eight, with nothing in my hands but paper." (1)

He seems to be rebuking himself that all his forty odd volumes and multitudinous occasional papers stand for nothing in the sight of God. And, at the end, just before the wrestler is about to enter the Great Beyond, we find him alone before his God, his passions stilled, his soul bathed with a fearfully expectant resignation. It is only when we read this opening passage of the Méditations d'un Solitaire in the light of all Bloy's struggles, temptations and stumblings that we can really penetrate what is one of the finest pieces of all mystical literature:

"I am alone. And yet I have a wife and two daughters who are devoted to me and to whom I am devoted. I have godsons and goddaughters whom the Holy Ghost seems to have chosen. I have sure proven friends, far more of them than one can usually have. ~~proven friends, far more of~~

But, all the same, I am only one of my kind. I am alone in God's antechamber.

When my turn comes to appear before Him, where will be those I have loved and who have loved me? Of course I know that a few who know how to pray, will pray for me with all their hearts, but how far away they will be then, and how terrible will be my solitude before my Judge!

The closer one draws to God, the more one is alone. Here is the infinity of Solitude.

At that moment, all holy Sayings, read so many times in my dark cave, will be made manifest to me, and the Precept of Hating father, mother, children, brothers, sisters, and even one's own soul, if one would go to Christ, will weigh on me heavily like a mountain of glowing granite.

(1) Au Seuñl de l'Apocalypse p.2233 O.C.
Tr. fr. Léon Bloy: Pilgrim of the Absolute p.293

Where will they be, those humble churches with their beloved walls, in which I prayed with so much love, at times, for the living and for the dead? Where will they be, those cherished tears that were my hope as a sinner, when I could not go on, crushed by love and suffering? And what will have become of my poor books, wherein I sought for the story of the merciful Trinity?

On whom, on what will I lean? Will the prayers of the well-beloved souls whom I gave to the Church have the time or the strength to come to my succour? Nothing assures me that the Angel charged with guarding me will not himself be trembling with compassion, and shaking like some ill-clad fellow forgotten outside a door in desperately cold weather. I shall be inexpressably alone and I know in advance I shall not even have a second in which to throw myself into the abyss of light or the abyss of darkness.

'I am forced to accuse you!' my conscience will say, and my best-loved friends will from an infinite distance confess their powerlessness. Defend yourself as best you can, poor wretch!

'It is true that, after God, we owe you the life of our souls,' they will say, sobbing, 'and this makes us hope that yours will be treated gently. But look..there is between you and us the great Chaos of Death. You have become to us unimaginable, and you share in the unimaginable Solitude. If you had not been absolutely a disciple, if you had not sold everything and forsaken everything, we know that you are there where a thousand years are as a day, and that one single look from the Eyes of your Judge can have the speed of lightning or the unutterable duration of all the centuries. For we guess at nothing, unless it be that you are inconceivably alone and that if one of us could go to you, he would not succeed in recognising you. But even this we are incapable of understanding. So farewell until the wholly unknown hour of the universal Judgment, which is another, more impenetrable mystery.'

Adjuro te per Deum vivum (I adjure thee by the living God), said the Chief Priest in order to constrain Jesus to speak. This prodigious summons, which disconcerted the stars, still continues, and mankind will have uttered its last outcry when it sees itself alone, at the end of ends, in the incomprehensible valley of Josaphat." (1)

Thus, even at the end of life's fitful day, although he did learn the hard lesson of resignation, there was no peace in Bloy's experience. Probably he would have equated such peace with mental

(1) Méditations d'un Solitaire Tr. fr. Léon Bloy: Pilgrim of the Absolute pp.332-333.

stagnation and a petrification of one's sensibilities. The haunting melancholy which he voiced in La Femme Pauvre remained with Bloy to the end:

"There is only one sadness; it is the sadness of
NOT BEING SAINTS." (1)

All his life long he had tried with intense devotion to be an absolute Christian. He never tried to excuse himself and say that there would only be one absolute Christian, Jesus Christ Himself. It never occurred to him that he was attempting the impossible. From a theoretical point of view we may conclude that such a project was impossible in this finite world of relativity. But Bloy was no philosopher. He was a poet, with a poet's frenzy. Having glimpsed the Vision Beautiful with an absoluteness of perspicacity given to few, he assumed that God had endowed him with his artistic power to translate that vision into flesh and blood reality. After all, the essence of his vision was a 'Man of sorrows and acquainted with Grief'. And each and all of the works of Bloy bears witness to the fact that he as nearly captured the truth of that divine Image and clothed it in fleshly garb, as was humanly possible. If he failed, he failed gloriously. The failure to be a saint in spite of all one's struggling and suffering and prayers is but another mirror reflecting the glory of the Cross.

Only a man who had been a Thankless Mendicant, stricken with an abject poverty that clung closer to him than his own skin, who through all his suffering and wretchedness stuck loyally to his

(1) La Femme Pauvre p.402 O.C.

Absolute, and though falling into sin again and again, by the sheer superabundance of a love and compassion scarcely tenable within the confines of human nature, yet never allowing the temporal inducements of the world to undermine the secret integrity of his soul; only a man who is seen in all his wretchedness and in all his grandeur in his novels, his diaries, his historical, moralising and religious studies, could at the end of his stormy life's pilgrimage stand before Almighty God and in humility of heart bow in solitary obedience before the majesty of His Divine Will. He who had spent his whole grief-stricken life waiting in an orgy of impatience for the coming of the Day of the Lord, now stood meekly before his Judge awaiting 'the unknown hour of universal Judgment'.

Raïssa Maritain tells us in her memoirs how deeply touched she and her friends were, when, after writing his wonderful passage 'Je suis seul', Bloy read it to them in his sympathetic almost inaudible tones.

And now, returning from our parenthetical journey which has taken us to the eventide of Bloy's life, to the Véronique incident again, it is time for us to ask what happened to this strange companion who so radically and pitifully disturbed his pilgrim way with all the bitter-sweetness of her remarkable personality. Her sad story ended tragically. In our last reference to the poor girl, we found her in rather a pitiable condition of mind; and this was but a portent of things to come. For her mind soon became totally unhinged. In his last letter to Leverdier, Marchenoir reveals the pathos of her hopeless condition:

"You wouldn't need to be a weakling if I were to tell you her story. Day by day, hour by hour I have seen dissolving and losing its rightful nature in a most horrible fashion that sound reason, that resplendent pearl of Christ's mantle, that star of the Orient, from its divinest simplicity!

She has reached the stage where she no longer recognises me... Her foster-father Joseph, her Saviour - as she used to call me - was a captive in a far country, and I appeared to her as a hangman come in his place to torment her..."(1)

But perhaps it is better for us to draw a veil over the last stages of Bloy's relationships with the unhappy Véronique. The details are given in all their poignancy in Colleye's and Bollery's biographies, and towards the end of Le Désespéré. Let it suffice here to say that the desperate man lived four months of positive nightmare alone with the pitiful creature on whose mind crisis followed upon crisis. The end had to come. On the 1st of July, 1882, Anne Marie Roulé was admitted to the Asylum of Sainte-Anne. From there she was transferred to the Bon-Sauveur on the 16th of September of the same year. She never regained her reason; but according to the testimony of the Mother Superior, she was gentle, devout and always incurably melancholy. Her death took place on the 7th of May, 1907.

No truthful account can be given of the Véronique drama which does not make mention of abbé Tardif de Moidrey and La Salette. Véronique and La Salette were the twin poles which constituted the orbit of the Catholic writer's spiritual experience during the crucial years 1877-1882. In Véronique he encountered his fiercest temptation with the sins of the flesh, albeit a temptation which was wonderfully and paradoxically blended with the divine compassion.

(1) Le Désespéré pp.344-345.

At La Salette he was given a religious focus to his life's mission to which he returned again and again as he poured upon an unheeding world the treasures of his prolific pen. He was, so to speak, poised between Heaven and Hell. That is what we meant when we spoke in the previous chapter of the reality of the Christian Zoroastrianism in Bloy's soul. No academic thing this, it proved itself on the pulses of a sensitively emotional nature. It ravaged the soul of the writer with an intensity which hammered places into that soul unsuspected hitherto.(1) We gaze with a profound awe on the battle royal going on between the forces of light and darkness which used Bloy's soul as a kind of racial battleground. We gaze and we tremble. For any full-blooded son of Eve, who has got a spark of sympathetic kinship with that great soul must admit that Bloy is not merely fighting his own solitary battle. He is fighting for us all.

Now, the importance of La Salette in Bloy's pilgrimage demands at least a chapter of its own, and it shall be engaging our attention very soon. Mention of it is made here only to remind us that it first swum into the writer's ken when he was living through the trials and temptations of the Véronique adventure.

Anyone, now, would have imagined that in 'romancing' through - a man of Bloy's dramatic temperament could never help romancing, he was born to it! - such a personal novel of glorified wretchedness, the hero would have had no time at all for any literary pursuits.

(1) See Lettres de Jeunesse p.55. "L'homme a des endroits de son pauvre coeur qui n'existent pas encore et où la douleur entre afin qu'ils soient."

Such a surmise, however, is far from the truth. Those months of anxiety, of subtle temptation, of gnawing hunger, grim poverty, fear, doubt and black despair, provided the rich'dung' (if we may make use of a Bloyan metaphor) which produced the first choice blossoms of Léon Bloy's literary garden. It has been ascertained that his first two books, La Chevalière de la Mort and the superb Révéléateur du Globe were composed during his association with Veronique. Not only so, but in the same period he penned Le Symbolisme de l'Apparition, which has been called the embryo of his entire work. This last-mentioned essay, undertaken under the inspiration of de Moidrey and the revelations of La Salette, was never completed. It remained in embryonic condition on the writer's desk until his death in 1917, and was published by his widow eight years later. In her preface to the book Mme Bloy says:

"Leon Bloy changed his position.(1) One chapter of his life had been brought to an end with his vision of La Salette in 1879. He entered into that period of darkness which was going to estrange him more and more throughout his successive catastrophes right up to the mighty tribulation of Le Désespéré..."(2)

"These poor leaflets, yellowed by age," she goes on to say, "are the only testimonials of a past that is buried in suffering, on which, nevertheless, the present book sheds a luminous beam."(3)

Referring to "the solemn unveiling of Frederic Brou's monument on Léon Bloy's grave a few weeks previously," she remarks, "The present book endures as the spiritual monument of the great writer's contemplative soul."(4)

Our present chapter has shown us that this spiritual monument was erected in Bloy's days of darkest despair.

(1) See further on this subject in next chapter on La Salette, p.160 ff.
(2) Symbolisme de l'Apparition p.11

(3) Ibid p.14

(4) Ibid p.14

CHAPTER 5.

LA SALETTE.

We have already stated that La Salette entered Bloy's life while he was consorting with Véronique. The latter landmark was to fade from his life, though not from his memory, but the Mountain was to remain with him to the end, so that in the course of the years he was to call himself "The Old Man of the Mountain." By an irony of coincidence the same year, 1877, in which he met his subtlest temptation in the person of the fair prostitute was the very year in which he also met his holiest inspiration in the person of the Abbé Tardif de Moidrey.

Up till that time Bloy had only adhered to the traditional Catholic devotions of which Notre Dame des Victoires and Saint Joseph were the prototypes. The year 1877, however, brought a breath of living interest into the religion of the Book, which he was beginning to study with an unheard-of fury. The story of the appearance of the Virgin Mary on La Salette and her tearful warnings to the two peasant children (a translation of which we give as a supplement to this chapter) (1) convinced the expectant Bloy that the divine apparitions contained in the Old and New Testaments had not come to an end after the Apocalypse had been written. Following his spiritual monitor he took the message of La Salette as the latter-day admonitions from Heaven which must be passed on to all the world. When he learned that the portentous event took place in the year of his own birth, Bloy became more excited than ever.

(1) See pp 154 ff of this work at end of present chapter.

All through his life he had a keen eye for coincidence, and all the different saints' days in the Catholic calendar possessed their own characteristic significance and solemnity. Since the Holy Virgin had deemed it wise to choose his own birth-year to make her latest appearance upon the earth, Bloy duly accepted the fact as the indisputable mark that he was to be Her own peculiar servant. He found an endorsement for this commission in the memory that his mother, by giving him the name Léon-Marie Bloy had specially entrusted her child to the care of the Mother of God. A good way of understanding the relationship between the Virgin and her loyal and trusted Champion is to read Bloy's letter to the countess of Lorgues in December 1879, which contains the following passage;

"...The first thought of my excellent mother at my birth was to entrust me by a special vow to Mary, whose name I received, and during thirty-three years this weeping Sovereign has knocked without relaxation on the door of my heart. In the end, tired of waiting and judging, doubtless, that there was no ground for hoping that I would decide to open, she quite simply broke down the door and entered with 9,000 angels into my den. Now, I am no longer in my own house. I must live on my knees, and in no other way. Any other position would be unbecoming and even impossible. What an incredible choice the Holy Virgin has made and what an astonishing destiny is mine!" (1)

He is even more insistent on the uniqueness of his relationship with Mary in one of his letters to his fiancée. After extolling the veneration of the Virgin in a passage of rare beauty, he goes on to say:

"...I have told you once or twice that I expected my deliverance and our happy marriage to result from your conversion. But I have never dared to tell you all my thought. I am setting

(1) L'Âme de Léon Bloy p.197.

all my hopes on Mary. It is Mary who should give you to me. Listen carefully. Before I came into the world my mother, who was a heart-felt Christian desired that I should not be her child. By an extraordinary effort of the will and of love which can only be understood by superior souls, she handed over her natural rights to Mary. She made the Holy Virgin responsible for my destiny, and as long as she lived she never ceased to tell me with divine obstinacy that Mary was my real mother in a very special and absolute way. So you must go to Her, my beloved Jeanne, if you want to come to me." (1)

The Catholic Church as a whole, however, was not unduly perturbed by the so-called miracle at La Salette. Some of the Church dignitaries were inclined to question the authenticity of the Appearance; others took good care to appease the souls of the devout by taking the sting out of the words of the Apparition and making harmless sermons out of them. The disturbing tears were drowned in holy water.

There was a third party, though, who were moved with righteous indignation and resolved to avenge the Virgin. De Moidrey belonged to this section. He seemed to detect in the mystery of La Salette a profound message of doom which broke through the accustomed framework of pious devotions. What the Madonna was requiring - so he was convinced - was not so much prayers or another ritual ceremonial, but a return of men's hearts to God. In fact, for Abbé Tardif, La Salette was to be classed with the great mountains of Holy Writ such as Sinai and Calvary. When the good priest had an intuition like that, and beheld the lukewarmness with which the Apparition was viewed by the Church, he girded himself to traverse the whole of France to rouse a slumbering and straying Christendom to the awesome truth of the genuine warning of La Salette. To make any impression against an almost universal

(1) Letters to his Fiancée pp.142-143

apathy demanded the labours of a giant. This was the reason why de Moidrey was on the outlook for a writer of genius who could give literary form to the passionate oratory of which he himself was a master. It is no wonder that such a greatheart opened his arms to Bloy and welcomed him as a long-lost brother. When the priest initiated the writer into the solemn mystery as the very pivot of the religious life of the time to come, Bloy, deeply read in the Scriptures, kindled to the idea at once. It was as though the veil of the temple had been rent from top to bottom, disclosing the continuation of the prophetic books. Undoubtedly, another book of the Apocalypse would require to be written.

"It would seem," wrote Bloy at this time - speaking of the Apparition - "that the surrounding mountains ought not to have subsisted before such tears, and that all this wild world of nature should have exulted and leapt like the mountains of the psalmist. It would seem, at the very least, that France should have been kindled like a torch at these miraculous tidings and should have rushed with all its land-marks towards this new Horab where the Mother of God had looked upon the affliction of Her people and had been moved with a vast pity by the universal crying of the oppressed souls of Her children." (1)

With such a vision of the significance of the Virgin's visitation at La Salette there was no possible option for these two men. They had to be pilgrims. In the first place they were to go to ask inspiration from the Virgin, Herself, on Her holy mount; and thereafter they must hasten to the Holy Land. The abbé was a man of some little means and it was through his personal fortune that such an adventurous pilgrimage was to be made possible. We can sense the thrill of exaltation in Bloy's

(1) Le Symbolisme de l'Apparition pp.22-23

mind in this letter he wrote to Count Roselly de Lorgues on August 1879:

"A priest who is rich both in earthly and heavenly goods and at the same time very interested in myself, who am a kind of symbolic combination of two varieties of poverty, is taking me to La Salette for a few days. This churchman's plan is to get me to return from this pilgrimage sanctified, in the first place - a point I certainly could be doing with - and fortified, in the next place, for a work of historical and theological refutation in connection with the Apparition of La Salette, which quite lately, as you remember, was the object of more stupid attacks." (1)

As the days passed Bloy confided to the abbé the secret of his relationship with Véronique. The wise friend had understood the pathos of his singular situation. He expressed his interest in the 'poor child' and told Bloy to bring her along to La Salette on the following year.

While the two men were together at La Salette, Bloy commenced the writing of the first pages of Le Symbolisme de l'Apparition. The priest got very enthusiastic over it and cried:

"Friend, what you have written is so splendid that the Holy Virgin must have blended Herself in it in a co-operative effort that is truly outstanding." (2)

They had decided to depart from La Salette on the 8th of September, the day of the Festival of the Nativity of the Holy Virgin. Returning to Paris, they were to make the necessary preparations for their journey to Palestine. Alas for their lofty aspirations - wholly conceived as they were for the glory of God and the Blessed Virgin! As the priest felt somewhat out of sorts, his aide-de-camp agreed to travel alone to Paris. What was his surprise and grief to learn by telegram some little time later

(1) L'Ame de Léon Bloy p.188

(2) Ibid p.189.

that his spiritual father had sickened of erysipelas and died on the very anniversary of the Apparition and the day of the Festival of the Seven Sufferings of the Virgin!

Some indication of the despair and emotional distraction suffered by Bloy over this sad loss may be gleaned from a letter he wrote to the missionary at La Salette who had looked after the invalid during his short illness. We quote a few of the salient passages:

"My dear Father,
I am writing you with a heart that is drowned in grief. For two days I have lived among tears. This death of my much-loved spiritual father has stabbed me. I am really out of my mind with suffering and cannot be consoled. A great light has been extinguished. Only a very few people knew the value of that intelligence and heart. God has recalled to Himself that soul, of whom the world was not worthy, and our gentle Mother has thought it good that he should be taken on the Nativity of Her Apostle - the anniversary of Her Apparition on the sacred Mount. May their sacred names be blessed for ever. Yet, how cruel is this loss! Why did I never suspect that my poor abbé was going to die? The grief of having ~~so~~ suddenly left him has aggravated my great suffering for having lost him altogether, and adds a feeling of unspeakable bitterness to the fearful reality of his death...I am suffering as though I had never suffered before. As I write you I feel suffocated with tears. If you only knew the projects we had formed together for the glory of the Holy Virgin and for the enlargement of Her cult! God has broken all that. May His will be done. All I can do now is to keep from utter despair. I had begun, under my friend's eye, a great work on La Salette, and to-day this work, which I must continue and complete, just breaks my heart. Pray the Holy Virgin to help me, for in very truth I don't know what is going to become of me. This excellent man used to tell me that all obstacles and pains must be expected when a person busies himself lovingly with La Salette. I am proving cruelly the truth of that saying..."(1)

As we have indicated in the previous chapter, Bloy never completed Le Symbolisme de l'Apparition. The experience of le désespéré made him change his position. Almost thirty years were to elapse before - chiefly through the instigation of Pierre Termier - he brought out

(1) L'Ame de Léon Bloy pp.190-192

his book on La Salette. Mme Bloy tells us in her preface to Le Symbolisme se l'Apparition that

"when he composed Celle qui Pleure, he re-read this former study, but without finding in it any matter he could utilise for his new book which was to be of another character."

As far as we have been able to discover this 'change of position' wrought in Bloy's thought has been touched upon very lightly by Bloy's commentators. This is rather surprising. For surely it must have been something of more than ordinary significance that compelled a man to cease writing a book which was to be the literary expression of abbé de Moidrey's great spoken message of La Salette. Not only so: he was never able to complete it. Now how are we to explain this extraordinary fact? We seem driven to the conclusion that when he started writing Le Symbolisme his mind was running in one direction, but when he was half-way through with it, his mind went off in a different direction altogether. It was as though his train had passed through a certain junction which had altered the course of his life in an irrevocable manner. He could never go back to the junction and pick up the rails he had previously laid down in his unfinished volume.

Now, this 'change-over' seems to have resulted from Anne-Marie's influence, and especially from the communication of an awe-inspiring secret which he had sworn never to divulge. It is true that Colleye and others are inclined to pity Bloy and apologise for the excitable tenor of the letters he wrote to his

friend Hello and other correspondents during the latter part of his Véronique affair. Yet, that excitability must have had a cause which is not to be found merely in the appallingly desperate situation in which the unhappy 'mendiant ingrat' found himself. If we make a close scrutiny of the following letter he wrote to Hello on the 19th of April 1880, we may trace to some extent the underlying reason that motivated the change in his religious thinking:

"You still ask me to let you have the newly written pages of my book (i.e. Le Symbolisme de l'Apparition). That is going to be difficult, since I have given up that book. And for this reason. When I undertook it, I was infinitely far away from the thought of the coming of the Holy Spirit. This work of interpretation, according to my ideas, had to be realised in the sense of the reign of suffering, that is to say, of Jesus Christ. I was to lean on the traditions of the Holy Fathers and reject with horror any suggestion which would tempt me to deviate from them. In a word, I was to look at the past. You have seen how far I have been dragged from my path and how monstrously my heart has been enlarged. To-day there is no longer any framework. It is burst at every point, and the sudden desire for the third reign has overcome me like a consuming fire, and absolutely changed my point of view. Everything now has to be started all over again, and, in truth, I am not in a fit state to do anything about it at the moment. It is rather strange that my work on yourself has been the occasion of this total change-over, which I am going to call, if you like, my conversion. I am no longer the same man."

(1)

Ernest Hello was a visionary of the same calibre as Bloy and was eagerly awaiting the second coming of our Lord. We noticed in another letter of Bloy's to his friend, quoted in last chapter, that Véronique's self-appointed guardian confesses himself as being 'borne along the current of your wishes.' This would seem to indicate that Bloy was sharing more and more the Second-Adventist aspirations of his mystical friend. Now, the precise nature of the Second Coming is bathed in an atmosphere of obscurity

(1) L'Ame de Léon Bloy p.199

in Bloy. No doubt he would say that he was endeavouring to express the inexpressable: but there is more than a probability that he was trying to guard himself against a charge of heresy against orthodox Catholic doctrine. Reading between the lines, we have reason to believe that it was this fear as well as his pledged word to Véronique which muzzled him from making a full declaration of her famous secret.

Ten years after Véronique had disappeared from his life, her secret still continued to influence him, and his profoundest essay Le Salut par les Juifs was penned under the inspiration of the insights and intuitions revealed to him in the furious days of their mystical partnership. When Le Salut was challenged by a contributor to the Université Catholique of Lyon, as containing an ancient heresy on an imminent 'incarnation of the Paraclete', Bloy was immediately up in arms to defend his orthodoxy. He wrote to the Director of the Université Catholique:

"...But don't you think Mr Director that the right of criticism is in this case singularly overdone? If M. Calamus or any other masked individual had written, in connection with my book, that I had falsified the truth, for example, or that I was a man of notorious morals, it is possible that you would not have inserted so dangerous slanders, seeing that the laws of France authorise the victims to demand a severe reckoning.

Must I then believe that, profiting from the atheism of these same laws, you have accepted the fact sciens et prudens that one of your reviewers accuses me without proof of the most egregious crime that a Christian can commit?

I speak of the crime of heresy, infinitely more serious in the eyes of the Church than all other prevarications and acts of injustice. Since the 15th of February all readers of your review would believe that I am a renovator of the heresy of Vintras, and that I proclaim in the most explicit terms 'an imminent incarnation of the Paraclete.'

This old heresy, much older than the wretched Vintras, has always horrified me, and my book says not a word about it. I cannot, therefore, explain the extravagant accusation of which I am the object, save by what the printing-offices call, I believe a slip-up. Certain lines and certain words, meant to feature in another article have been unduly slipped into that of M. Calamus'. If that is not the reason, how can we account for the frightful frivolity of a man who expresses himself with a certain apparent seriousness, but who certainly ought not to absolve himself of the trouble of reading attentively the works which he has the audacity to criticise."(1)

Now, the subject-matter in dispute is contained in the closing pages of Le Salut. As far as we can make out Bloy seems to believe that the present dispensation, the Evangel of Blood, during which Christ must suffer till the end of the world, does not bring to a close the acts of revelation, but is only a kind of Old Testament charged with announcing the Comforter of Fire,(2) and He is to initiate the "Third Reign."(3)

"This unearthly Visitor which I have waited for all these four thousand years will have no friends and his wretchedness will make beggars look like emperors.

He will be the very dung-hill on which the Idumean beggar scrapes his sores, and anyone bending down over him is bound to see the very depths of suffering and wretchedness.

At his approach the sun will be turned into darkness and the moon into blood:..." (4)and so on in the same apocalyptic strain.

From reading these pages of Le Salut, we cannot help confessing that the reviewer in the Université Catholique had fairly good grounds for suspecting a belief in 'an imminent incarnation of the Paraclete.'

When, therefore Bloy wrote to his friend Hello the letter of April 19, 1880, and admitted that what he had written of Le Symbolisme de l'Apocalypse was a looking back at the past, he

(1) Le Mendiant Ingrat Vol.1. pp.147-148.

(2) Le Salut par les Juifs pp.202-204

(3) Ibid p.199

(4) Ibid p.204 See Tr. in Appendix at end of work, pp.87-88.

meant that he had been content to live and suffer in the dispensation of the Evangel of Blood. His mind had undergone no radical change from what we see in his earlier letters to Landry, where he had brought his philosophy of suffering to a fine art. Le Symbolisme, when he started it, was to be

"a work of interpretation...to be realised in the sense of the reign of suffering, that is to say, of Jesus Christ."

As far as we can understand Bloy, he seems to believe in Three Reigns. The First one was the Reign of God, lasting till the Advent of Jesus Christ. The Second one is the Reign of Christ, which is the present dispensation of Grace; while the Third one is to be the Reign of the Holy Ghost, which is going to be inaugurated when Jesus Christ, the suffering Saviour, has been un-nailed from the Cross.

Thus, when he commenced writing his book on La Salette he was to annotate his symbolism from the tradition of the Holy Fathers, and

"reject with horror any suggestions which would tempt him to deviate from them."

That is to say the magnet of his life had been in the past, in the tradition of the Holy Fathers. The very fact that he says he was to 'reject with horror' any deviation from ecclesiastical tradition seems to imply that this thought of the imminent coming of the Holy Spirit, which had moved the magnet of his life into the future, contained some kind of deviation from accepted tradition. In that 'deviation' lay the seeds of incipient heresy. Yet, as a devout son of the Church, he dared not allow these seeds to develop. So that

immediately any point of his work which emerged out of his new perspective was suspected as being heretical, he was at great pains to exculpate himself of the charge and re-affirm his orthodoxy.

(It may be worth mentioning that such a charge of heresy is entirely different from that levelled against Bloy by Heppenstall, to which we have referred in Chapter 2 of Part II. That so-called heresy of 'the provisional truce between Mercy and Justice' contains a deep suggestiveness which is very much in keeping with Christian teaching, although it has been challenged - wrongly we think - by Charles Journet in his Destinées d'Israël.(1) Commenting on that very same passage, Mme Maritain appositely says:

"Bloy knew well that hell is without hope, and that it is absolutely impossible for someone damned, having forever of his own accord rejected charity, to call on God's love, or His glory. But he expressed himself by means of a fable or myth to force the imagination to 'feel' in some way or other that incomprehensible 'conflict' between Love and Justice, within God Himself, which obsessed his heart like a mystery beyond all intelligible expression, even analogical and deficient."(2))

Now, if we examine the first part of the book on La Salette, (i.e. Le Symbolisme de l'Apparition) from which the unfinished volume derives its name, we find an impressive glorification of the Virgin Mary, written in a lofty and unruffled style. As Bloy tells the missionary at La Salette, it was written 'for the glory of the Holy Virgin and for the enlargement of Her cult.' In his capacity as a commissioned Champion of the Mother of our Lord, Bloy felt called to magnify the veneration of the Virgin in the eyes of his co-religionists. This was done, in the first instance,

(1) See Destinées d'Israël pp.421, 422-425

(2) Léon Bloy: Pilgrim of the Absolute p.339 (Footnote.)

without any overwhelming obsession with the thought of the imminent coming of the Holy Spirit. One, indeed, is impressed by the superb tranquillity and the exalted meditations which the Lady of Sorrows inspired in the imagination of Her servant. But one short year after Le Symbolisme altered all that. Calm tranquillity gives way to the staccato panting of a man who is out of breath in his mad rush towards the Day of the Lord, which apparently is just round the corner.

"I have a hunger and thirst so furious for the glory of God," he wrote to Hello, "that I count the days like a madman...Everything that is not this retribution of justice, or at least, the hope of that imminent retribution gets on my nerves to the point of madness." (1)

Continuing his correspondence in the same excitable vein, he says:

"My dear friend, all that I can tell you, without violating this secret in any way, is that after Anne-Marie, the fact of La Salette bears immediately on the advent of the Holy Spirit, and that the celebrated secrets of the two children which nobody even yet thoroughly understands, are in part identical with hers. She wanted to see Mélanie. As for the Discourse of the Holy Virgin, she says exactly as I do, without having read my work, that it is the Mystery of the Holy Spirit, of His Advent; but with a profundity of symbolism impenetrable to anybody before the stipulated time."

(Discussing the famous Lumen in coelo, Bloy goes on to state that it will take place before the year is out. He was, we remember, writing in the month of May, 1880.) Continuing, he says:

"It will take place in the sky. God will have veiled from the angels and saints the profound secret of His designs for the world. It is the secret of fire and it is the secret of the Cross, and those two secrets amount to one only, and that explains this anger of the Dove, spoken of by Jeremiah.(XXV 33.)" (2)

Perhaps, then, it would not be too much to say that Bloy's life can be divided into two parts. The first part lasted until he was

(1) See p.119 of this work

(2) Léon Bloy: (Éssai de biographie) Vol.1. p.433

thirty-three years of age, during which time the focus of his existence was in the present as it emerged from the past. Between thirty-three and thirty-four the famous 'secret' was communicated to him, and from then till the end of his days the focus of his existence was the imminent future. By the time he was thirty-three he had fully elaborated his philosophy of suffering. In spite of all his trials and tribulations and the extreme wretchedness and poverty of his life, he had nevertheless learnt to subject himself to the discipline of the Irrevocable, without any undue impatience - only the natural impatience of a human being who is "up against it" and who is fretting to overcome the almost insuperable obstacles which from time to time obstruct his path. But from thirty-four onwards there is an element of 'supernatural' impatience traceable in his works. He lived, worked, and above all suffered to bring in the Great and Terrible Day of the Lord.

Whatever Véronique's secret might have been, there is not the slightest doubt that it gave Bloy a new angle from which to view the Discourse given by the Virgin on La Salette. The pull of the imminent future was henceforth to operate with uncanny force upon his mind making him, as Professor Béguin brings out in his book, "Léon Bloy, the Impatient." There is reason to believe, too, that the 'secret' inspired Bloy with the hope that he was to have some prominent part to play in the coming dispensation of the Holy Ghost which was shortly to make its terrifying inauguration.

These eschatological expectations were further confirmed by Mélanie in the later years of her life. Therefore it will be understood that the whole bias of the Catholic writer's thought tempted him to repeat Vintras' heresy concerning the "imminent incarnation of the Paraclete."

The following quotations from his war-time diaries towards the end of his life bear ample witness to the truth of this charge:

"Then what is left?' I shall be asked. 'Absolutely nothing but to celebrate the Last Supper in the Catacombs and wait for the Deliverer whom the Paraclete is to send, when the blood of the many who have paid the penalty and the tears of the few elect shall have sufficiently cleansed the earth...

"When France has been purified by the scourge of divine Justice, 'Mélanie wrote in 1892, 'when she has been almost destroyed and is nearly dead, then God will give her a Man.' It is for him and no one else I have been waiting in my loneliness for forty years." (1)

There are innumerable references in Bloy's diary between 1914-1917 to the hopes of the arrival of this mysterious Figure. For example here are several extracts from the closing months of 1915:

X "25th August: I am waiting for a Man so infinitely unknown that beside him the greatest strangers will seem like first cousins; a man in rags, I should imagine; a barefoot tramp, I very much hope, but a man specially sent, whose mission is to accomplish all."

X "25th October: For my part, I am waiting for a man. I am waiting with unspeakable confidence..."

X "16th November: I am waiting for the Holy Ghost, who is the Fire of God, and I have really nothing else to say."

X "20th November: I do not know him any more than you do, but I know that he will come, soon perhaps - or rather that he will appear, for I believe he has come already."

(1) Quotations from Léon Bloy: A Study in Impatience pp239-240.
X It is noteworthy that the entries marked X are not given by the editor of Oeuvres Complètes. These and other omissions are no doubt deliberate.

X "17th December: I am waiting for a man, a Leader given by God. My constant, devouring thought is this: All these horrors must end, as always, in a man sent by God and I feel that that man exists. Where is he, and why doesn't he reveal himself? This intense preoccupation never leaves me, sleeping or waking, and when I suffer it makes my sufferings ten times as great. In Church I weep at the thought of that Unknown, without whom nothing seems possible, though I am perhaps the only one to divine or know that he exists. I call upon him per Deum vivum and by all the sacred names, and I come back, overwhelmed, to read newspapers that drive me to despair.

You will remember one day, my friend, that I told you this, and perhaps you will then be surprised that you were inclined to smile." (1)

Then at the end of Au Seuil de l'Apocalypse, his second last volume, he wrote these lines, printing the last in block capitals:

"All greatness is exiled in the depths of History and, if God wants to act openly, He will have to take action Himself victoriously, as He did two thousand years ago when He rose from the dead.

I AM WAITING FOR THE COSSACKS AND THE HOLY GHOST." (2)

Whether Bloy was guilty of Vintras' heresy or not, need not distress us today, though an attempt is made in Mme Maritain's memoirs to reassure us that no suspicion of strange doctrine is to be found in the closing pages of Le Salut, to which we referred above. It is only fair that we should state her "defence" at this point, before making some comments on the same:

"Later he explained to us many things in the magnificent but obscure text. (i.e. Le Salut) It involves neither the manifestation of a new Gospel nor the coming of the Holy Spirit under a visible and personal form, as has sometimes been very falsely said.

We understand that Léon Bloy was thinking of an invisible Passion within the Church and within men's hearts, suffered by the Consoler Whom we unceasingly afflict, and more and more cruelly - by the Holy Spirit Who laments in us 'with groanings that cannot be uttered.' (Rom. 8.26)

But it is only today, confronted with the unspeakable Passion, that of Love, afflicted in the heart of men and among nations, and in the light of present events that we can really take stock

(1) Léon Bloy: A Study in Impatience pp. 239-240.

(2) Ibid. p. 240. Tr. of Au Seuil de l'Apocalypse

X Only first sentence given in O.C. p.2325 in O.C.

of the prodigiously exact vision Léon Bloy had of the misery of his time and of our own, Christendom, founded at the cost of the blood of martyrs, is falling to dust. The Church which is entrusted with all the human race is like an abandoned mother who no longer has the power to protect her children. And who, among the leaders of nations, still thinks of the rights of truth and justice, or mercy or of pity?

The Passion of the Holy Spirit, foretold by Léon Bloy, has already begun in the hearts of the poor and the oppressed, and of all those who suffer persecution, without any inspired voice calling for justice.

If our world continues its descent into Hell, when men will have exterminated pity, 'disgust will even kill anger' and the Holy Spirit, that 'Outcast of Outcasts, will be silently condemned by judges the mildness of whose manner is beyond reproach.'

The Passion of Israel will be the reflected image of this agony of Love. And in this unspeakable community of suffering, Israel will recognise Him of Whom it is the symbol. It will be its 'resurrection from among the dead' affirmed by Saint Paul and predicted by Ezekiel, from whom Léon Bloy quotes as his own ending." (1)

Now, with all due respect to Mme Maritain, it is a little difficult to reconcile the "invisible Passion...within men's hearts, suffered by the Consoler Whom we unceasingly afflict", and the appearance of "a Man", who^{was}/so furiously anticipated by Bloy in the latter stages of the Diary. Besides, what are we to make of "This unheard-of Visitor, Whom I have awaited four thousand years"? Mme Maritain admits that the text is "obscure" and that Bloy had to "explain" it to his friends. But the unfortunate reviewer in the Université Catholique of Lyon (no more than the rest of us) had no such inspired guide to help him. If Bloy speaks of "waiting for the Holy Ghost who is the Fire of God", one month and then a month later speaks of "waiting for a man, a Leader given by God", we naturally conclude that he was expecting some human manifestation of the Holy Ghost, or at least, some

(1) We have been Friends together pp. 135-136

visible representative sent by the Holy Ghost. To imagine any other thing would appear to twist the plain meaning of words. So that in spite of all our efforts to keep Bloy's faith on the straight and narrow road of Catholic orthodoxy, we are unable to absolve him from the suspicion of a charge of Vintras' heresy which believed in "an imminent incarnation of the Paraclete."

Not that that matters very much now. For one thing is abundantly evident: that he was much nearer to the scriptural spirit of expectancy laid down in the twenty-fourth chapter of St. Matthew's Gospel than many of those who levelled the charge against him. In this respect Bloy's life and thought teaches us all to obey our Lord's solemn injunction: "Watch therefore: for ye know not on what day your Lord cometh." (1)

Again, now, by an irony of coincidences, a physical contact between Véronique and La Salette was established in 1880 when Bloy escorted his fair companion to the sacred Mount. He confessed to Hello in a letter that he felt drawn to La Salette in an irresistible manner, and even purposed going there on foot, seeing that no funds were available to take him to his desired haven. However, just as on all occasions when he made the same mission, a friend stepped in to furnish the required pecuniary assistance. This time it was Mme Charles Hayem, the wife of Georges Landry's employer, a lady of Jewish family, who played the part of the good samaritan. So, as he wrote to Hello, he "went to plant his beggar's tent on the mountain of La Salette" where he had "every confidence of receiving new illuminations." In the same letter he writes:

(1) Matt. 24.42.

"I have very strong reasons for believing that the discourse of La Salette which I have called the Verbum novissimum of the Holy Spirit, contains under an extremely symbolical form and conceals the secret which was the despair of Lucifer himself. This is the first word spoken publicly and for all the world to hear which Mary has delivered since the wedding of Cana, as I have already noted you. The eighteen centuries which separate these two epochs are the mysterious and fearful abyss of our Sovereign Lady's silence." (1)

It is not stretching imagination too far to speculate that the "very strong reasons" (*très fortes raisons*) mentioned here, and the "secret, which was the despair of Lucifer", were not unconnected with Bloy's own "secret" imparted to him by his strange friend, who had, indeed, over-reached himself in the extravagance of her mysticism.

On this second journey to La Salette Bloy found out all the details of the passing of his dear friend Abbé de Moidrey. Writing to the abbé's brother, he says:

"This is the anniversary of his death and I look upon it as a remarkable favour to be here at this moment. The memory of that rare, magnanimous spirit by whom my intelligence and my heart were opened to the things of God has become, after the grievous anguish of the first days which followed his departure from this world, one of my sweetest and most refreshing thoughts. I go every day to pray at his tomb not for his soul which must be long in glory, but for all those whom he loved and who suffer still on the earth. I always come away a little stronger and confirmed in hope..." (2)

The presence of Véronique, however, was a source of embarrassment to the missionaries at La Salette, especially as Bloy prolonged his visit much longer than the customary length of time, dreading as he was the resumption of the desperate hand-to-mouth existence which he ~~knew~~ was awaiting his protégée and himself once they were back again in Paris. Things became so bad that M. Perrin, the chief missionary, had to ask him to "pack up" (*déguepir*), which

(1) L'Ame de Léon Bloy p.202
(2) Ibid pp.204-205

Bloy eventually did, though not without protesting violently.

Many years later, through the generosity of Pierre Termier, he again went to La Salette to receive the necessary inspiration for his long-deferred book on the visitation of the Virgin to Mélanie and Maximin which took place, we remember, as far back as September 19, 1846 in a village of Dauphine.

His visit there, however, in August 1906 was treated with scant respect and he had occasion to write sorrowfully to Mme Maritain: "Raïssa you will learn not without edification that the author of Le Salut par les Juifs is greatly scorned here." He was referring to that book in particular because it had been re-edited the preceding winter at the expense of the Maritains. Bloy had written on Raïssa's copy: "The loftiest of my books", and he used to say that it "had been inspired by that very **Notre Dame de La Salette**, by that great Virgin in tears, above that little fountain which seems to flow from her eyes." On his arrival he had given a copy to the missionaries, but the poor, proud appearance of this spiritual don Quixote did not dispose the priests to regard him as an academician altogether. (1)

The sadness and bitterness inflicted on him in a place where only the gentleless of brotherly charity and sacred hospitality should have reigned, did not however deflect the author from the essential truths on which his soul was fixed. Writing to Raïssa in September 20th of that year he says:

"I was to suffer there and I knew it beforehand, just as one knows that one must undergo a painful but beneficial treatment. The contact with modern piety inevitable in so small

(1) See Adventures in Grace p.220.

a place, is for me, as you know, the most grievous experience, a really pernicious sensation capable of throwing me into despair."

Again, in December 4th he wrote ~~Mme~~ Maritain to pray to our Lady of La Salette as "the most extraordinary since Pentecost." All along he had continued to believe in the absolute value of Mélanie's revelations and of her "secret". This secret was distinct from the public message immediately communicated to the two children. The shepherdess Mélanie said she had received it from the Blessed Virgin with the command not to divulge it until after 1864. This she did in pamphlet form, appearing under the imprimatur of Mgr Zola, bishop of Lecce. (1)

In Celle qui Pleure Bloy wishes to impress us with the significance of the eschatological warnings uttered by the Weeping Virgin in September 1846. He felt cruelly tormented

"at the sight of the frightfully imbecilic world which had rejected, vomited out for sixty years the miraculous warnings of La Salette...and continues in its depravity, sure of saving its dear flesh and its holy money...Jacques, Raissa, Vera," he implores his friends, "obtain for me the courage to combat these ferocious and unclean beasts." (2)

To equip him for the writing of Celle qui Pleure, documents had to be sent him, containing the letters and writings of the shepherdess of La Salette. These were forwarded to him by Abbé Combe, one of Mélanie's spiritual directors in the last years of her life in France. She was to leave her native land for Italy, and there she died in 1903, an old lady over seventy years of age.

The most remarkable of these documents is unmistakably the account of the childhood of Mélanie up till the age of fifteen,

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| (1) | See <u>Adventures de Grace</u> | P.221. |
| (2) | Ibid. | p.222. |

written by herself. It is a most beautiful and astonishing mystical text. Bloy published it later under the title La Vie de Mélanie and added to it his own preface which is a literary gem of its own.

, While reading the correspondence of Mélanie, Bloy wrote on January 23, 1907:

"I had no little joy in finding in it numerous lines which in their ideas and the views of the future might have been written by myself, and even their form might have been mine. As Mélanie's letters are dated, I have been able to notice, not without emotion, that there are several concordances of date, i.e. that in this or that of my books, certain statements or predictions correspond to the identical words which Mélanie wrote or uttered at the same time. What she received by direct revelation, I received by a simultaneous intuition.

The older sister could have drawn me close in her arms before dying in darkness and loneliness, like Marchennoir. I shall show the exceptionally tragic character of this story which is like no other." (1)

As Mme Maritain says in her memoirs:

"The affinity between the shepherdess of La Salette and Bloy is striking: both were great and melancholy, grave and full of the Absolute, with no worldliness whatsoever, no cleverness or frivolity; both were poor and unrecognised. And from the things of the world and the things of God they both had the same crucifying experience, having both been called into the service of Our Lady of the Seven Sorrows." (2)

In L'Invendable Bloy reports his last visit to the cemetery which contained the grave of his departed friend, de Moidray, before he left La Salette in the autumn of 1906:

"August 25, 1906: Before leaving La Salette I went up to the little cemetery where lie the pitiable remains of my dear Father Tardif de Moidrey, who took me to La Salette in 1879, only to die three weeks later, thus leaving me an orphan.

The last days of this priest of Mary were bitter, bitter indeed. No one except myself knew of it. His sorrow at not seeing the triumph of La Salette and the endless spectacle of clerical mediocrity gnawed at his heart and partly accounted for

(1) See Adventures in Grace p.223
(2) Ibid p.223

his death.

Yet how far was he from knowing the whole truth, then so hidden and so little known since! Besides, the greatest iniquity had not yet been penetrated, or had been committed too recently and with too much cunning for him to suspect it. It was misery enough for him to see La Salette slighted and its missionaries unequal to their task...

Farewell, then, to that dear little cemetery, to that woeful basilica, to that winding Way of the Cross that marks the exact route taken by the Procession of Our Lady of Threats...Uncertain of ever seeing any of this again, I tried to engrave the image of it on my memory.

The dawn was coming. Austere Obiou and the bald peaks over which it watches were dyed with pink. A limitless opal filled space. An enchantment lasting a few minutes, after which the fearful sun would riddle all creation with its fires. I stopped once again close beside the grave of the one I loved and I thought on the frightening future - the inconceivable, unspeakably frightening future - which has already come." (1)

Yet once again in 1910, Léon Bloy made his pilgrim way to La Salette, in order to prepare himself for the writing of his La Vie de Mélanie. This time he seems to have been more favourably received, for he came back happy. In a letter to Jacques Maritain on July 12, 1910, he says:

"I have been favoured, and the impressions I received at Corps no longer allow me to doubt my mission..."(2)

He certainly had a better sale for La Vie de Mélanie than he had had for Celle qui Pleure, which had "a sad fate on the Catholic market." He was fortunate in having a remarkable review on the book by Rachilde, one of the directors of Mercure de France, for whom the Catholic writer had always had an affectionate regard in spite of the divergence of their views. She admitted that she had been lost in admiration in reading Mélanie's life; and Bloy, writing to his godchildren the Maritains, said:

"She whom one would have believed so far removed from religious feeling...had thrown aside all the miserable novels it was her job to review, and had spent the night reading this book, and had immediately written for the Paris Journal

(1) Tr. from Léon Bloy: Pilgrimage of the Absolute pp.229-230

(2) Adventures in Grace p.241.

a really extraordinary article." (1)

This chapter has taught us at least a little of the part which La Salette played in the life of the great Catholic writer. Perhaps one might be inclined to ask whether it was only some fortuitous accident that made the Mountain loom so largely in the thought of an excitable Frenchman. After all, what has resulted from the prophecies of La Salette? Fearful happenings were, indeed, foretold in 1846: and even more fearful happenings have actually taken place in and between the two great world wars. But history has developed in a different manner altogether from that predicted by the Virgin who "appeared" on the Mount more than a hundred years ago. Nevertheless, that does not invalidate the warnings reputed to have been given at La Salette, in which Léon Bloy implicitly believed. The business of the prophet is not to cross the t's of coming history but rather to adumbrate the general outcome of the moral and spiritual tendencies in the soul of a people. False and misleading appearances obscure the unpalatable truth from eyes that are unwilling to see.

With his penetrating eyes, this man of the Absolute saw through the glittering façade of so-called nineteenth century progress. He saw through the facade to the corrupt and morally disintegrating pillars over which it was glaringly built. He knew that the superstructure of society could not go on forever on such a tottering support. He knew with perfect certitude that it would fall under the weight of its own sin and practical atheism. Long before the deluge overtook us he saw that the

(1) Adventures in Grace p.242.

deluge was inevitable. After the event, of course, it is easy to be wise and say that Léon Bloy was right. But to forecast doom in the heyday of nineteenth century optimism was to invite the derision of a blinded populace. "Léon Bloy must be mad" they said, "La Salette has gone to his head."

Nowadays we have not much bother in agreeing with Prof. Butterfield that

"men may live to a great age in days of comparative quietness and peaceful progress without ever having to come to grips with the universe, without ever vividly realising the problems and the paradoxes with which human history so often confronts us. And we of the twentieth century have been particularly spoiled: for the men of the Old Testament, the ancient Greeks and all our ancestors down to the seventeenth century, betray in their philosophy and their outlook a terrible awareness of the chanciness of human life, and the precarious nature of men's existence in this risky universe. These things - though they are part of the fundamental experience of mankind - have been greatly concealed from recent generations because modern science and organisation have enabled us to build up so tremendous a barrier against fire, famine, plague and violence. The modern world created a vast system of insurance against these contingencies and accidents of time, so that we have come to assume that it was normal to have smooth going-on and that the uncertainties of life in the past had been due to mere inefficiency." (1)

When Butterfield continues in the following vein in his broadcast series on Christianity and History, we find ourselves nodding our assent, as we listen somewhat uneasily on our armchair:

"All the same, when men ceased to talk of making the world safe for democracy, one suspected that one heard half-an-echo of a satirical laugh a great distance away, somewhere amongst the interplanetary spaces. After that, statesmen became still more presumptuous and promised that by a victory in war they could secure for the world 'freedom from fear'; but it has not taken us long to realise - and to realise with a wealth of dreadful meaning - that there are occasions when God mocks. I used to say that all our modern system of insurance against danger only meant that perhaps we might have fewer wars in future, but they would be much bigger when they came as to cancel out the profit -

(1) Christianity and History pp. 69-70

the bulge in the india-rubber ball would simply come out in another place. I now know that I was wrong in all this, for besides being bigger than before we might well wonder if the wars are not also to be more frequent. It is questionable whether even we can believe again that the next war will end all war, instead of rendering yet a further war more urgently necessary within a shorter time than before. Whether we escape the deluge or not, therefore, we are confronted by the threat of it on a scale out of all comparison with what was even feared in 1914. And history has renewed its risky, cataclysmic character." (1)

Yes: this "satirical laugh" was heard with astonishing force by the "Old Man of the Mountain", and even since Butterfield's arresting series on Christianity and History, subsequent events in the realm of international politics only serve to underline their unlovely truth. There is no indication at all on the horizon to convince us that history is going to lose its apocalyptic complexion for some time to come.

We would do well, therefore, to learn the value of La Salette in Léon Bloy's life and thought, which simply comes to this: It compelled him to live daily, hourly, momentarily in the Christian universe - that is to say in a universe that is under sentence of an imminent End. This is an authentic eschatology for all Christian men and women everywhere. The spirit inculcated by Bloy will save us from becoming slaves of the Irrevocable and lapsing into a mood of apathy and mediocrity, which curse men with the damnation of "being lived" and not living in the spirit of vital expectancy, always on the qui vive for the coming of the Great and Terrible Day of the Lord.

"Watch therefore," Léon Bloy would admonish us - echoing the words of his Master, "for ye know not when the lord of the house cometh, whether at even, or at midnight or at the cock-crowing or in the morning: lest coming suddenly he find you sleeping. And what I say unto you I say unto you all, Watch!" (2)

(1) Christianity and History p. 70
(2) Mark 13. 35-37

APPENDIX TO CHAPTER 5.

When Bloy wrote Celle qui Pleure, he added as an Appendix to his original book, Mélanie's own deliverance on "The Apparition of the Most Holy Virgin on the Mountain of La Salette", along with the "Secret" conveyed to her by the Virgin. The former appears on pp. 199-212, and the latter on pp. 213-222 of Celle qui Pleure (Oeuvres Complètes.)

It is, therefore, most fitting that an English translation of these documents should be given in a work dealing with "The Religious Thought of Léon Bloy", and no better place could be found for it than as an Appendix to Chapter 5 which brings out the significance of La Salette on the life and thought of the French author.

THE APPARITION OF THE MOST HOLY VIRGIN
ON THE MOUNTAIN OF LA SALETTE

Published by the Shepherdess of La Salette with the imprimatur of Mgr the Bishop of Lecce.

(Now children, see that you pass it on to all my people.)

The notes found here on each page, which form a commentary following on the Discourse of the Shepherdess, are from the hand of an excellent priest who had the honour of knowing Mélanie personally and of being her spiritual adviser, towards the latter part of her life.

I

On the 18th September, the day before the sacred Apparition of the Holy Virgin, I was alone, as usual, tending my Master's four cows. Towards 11 o'clock in the morning I saw a little boy coming towards me. At the sight of him I took fright, for it seemed to me that everybody must know that I avoided any kind of companionship. This child came up to me and said, "Little girl, I am coming with you; I, too, belong to Corps." At these words my bad nature was seen to get the better of me, and, stepping back a few steps I said to him: "I don't want anybody; I want to keep alone." Then I went off, but this child followed me(1) saying: "Come, let me go with you; my master told me to go and tend my cows with yours. I belong to Corps."

I still went further away from him, signing to him that I did not want anybody; and after I had got out of his way I sat down on the grass. There I held converse with the little flowers of the Good God.

(1) Mélanie was then 12 years and 6 months, but was not very big or strong - she would scarcely look to be more than 10. Temperamentally she was very timid, and her long years of service among strangers, as well as her mother's lack of affection - she had not even kissed the child! - had by no means served to repair this weakness of character. But the devout child, whom Heaven had visited a long time before 1846, eagerly sought out solitude, in order to be more united with God. Her 'Amiable Father' had told her: "Sister, flee from the noise of the world: love seclusion and contemplation: have your heart stayed on the Cross in your heart: let Jesus Christ be your sole occupation. Love silence and you will hear God's voice from Heaven speaking to your heart: form no partnership with anyone and God will be your all in all."

A moment afterwards I look behind me and find Maxim seated near me. He said to me immediately: "Watch over me: I'll be very good." (1) But my wicked nature would not listen to reason. I stood up hastily and fled a little further without saying anything to him, and once again I started playing with the flowers of the Good God. A moment later Maxim was there again to tell me he would be very good, and that his master had sent him beside me, &c. This time I pitied him and signed to him to sit down, while I continued to play with the little flowers of the Good God.

Maxim was not slow in breaking the silence: he began to laugh, (I believe he was mocking me): I looked at him and he said, "Let's have some fun: let's play a game!" I didn't reply, for I was ignorant about playing a game with anybody except myself,

- (1) Maxim was only 11 years old and looked at least 3 years older. He had never been in service and had only been asked by his father - a charcoal burner at Corps - to take a sick shepherd's place for a week. The father had refused at first, saying that 'Mémín', the stupid that he was, would let the cows fall over the cliffs: he had only conceded on the promise that there would always be someone to watch him. 'Mémín' was as frank as he was lively; too open and frolicsome. "Watch over me: I'll be very good." What simplicity!. But he kept twisting about and was perpetually on the move; and though very intelligent, he was so inattentive that after 3 years his father had difficulty in teaching him 'Our Father', and 'Hail, Mary'. He called him 'the innocent'.

Mélanie could neither speak nor understand French. Maxim did not speak it, but he understood a few words of it.

seeing I had always been alone. I played about alone with the flowers, and Maxim, getting quite close to me, could only laugh as he said that flowers had no ears to hear me, and that we ought to play together. But I had no inclination for the game he wanted me to play. However, I started to speak to him, and he told me that the ten days that he was to spend with his master were soon going to end, and that he would then be going back to Corps, to his father's home.

While he was speaking to me the bell of La Salette was heard to strike: it was the Angelus. I signed to Maxim to lift his soul to God. He took off his cap and kept still for a moment. Then I said to him, "Do you want some dinner?" - "Yes", he said, "Let's get some." We sat down. I took from my bag the provisions which my master had given me, and as was my custom before slicing my little round loaf with the blade of my knife, I made a cross on my bread, and in the middle a very tiny hole, saying, "If the devil is there, let him get out, but if the Good God is there, let Him stay," and very quickly I covered up the little hole. Maxim let out a great burst of laughter and gave my loaf a kick. It fell from my hands, rolled beneath the mound and was lost.

I had another piece of bread which we ate together; then we played a game. Afterwards, realising that Maxim must^{be} getting hungry (1)

(1) Instead of telling off the giddy fellow, who had sharply kicked the first little loaf, making it roll down the mountain, she not only shares the second one with him, but also thinks that he must be hungry and never thinks off herself at all. The privations and the penances which this frail child imposed on herself for years, and which she continued all her life, have been more than heroic: they have been miraculous.

I showed him a part of the mountain covered with berries. I got him to go and eat some and he did it at once: he ate some and brought his hat back full of some more. In the evening we went down from the mountain together, and we agreed to come back and tend our cows together.

The next day, 19th September(1) I find myself once more on the road with Maxim; we climb the mountain together. I found that Maxim was very good, very simple, and that quite readily he spoke about the things I wanted him to speak about; he was also rather gushing as though unable to keep back his feelings; still, he was a bit curious, for when I went off from him to the place where he saw I had stopped, he ran quickly to see what I was doing and to hear what I was saying to the Good God's flowers, and if he didn't get there in time, he would ask what I had been speaking about. Maxim told me to learn from him how to play a game. The morning was already far gone. I told him to gather some flowers to make a 'Paradise'.(2)

(1) On the 19th September of this year occurred the Eve of the Festival of Our Lady of the Seven Sorrows, whose vespers the Church recites at the very hour of the Apparition. The Holy Virgin's discourse, her clothing, her tears, the road she took, which had precisely the windings of Calvary's road - all was in accord with this Festival, so that we are in no doubt that we rebels against God and His Church are the seven swords which once transpierced His heart at the foot of the Cross.

(2) The scallywag, who spent all his time at Corps with the amusements of his age is bored with watching, and asks for another game. The Shepherdess, who never idly played about, teaches him then to make a Paradise.

Mary brought together these two dear children, of character so contrary, and the hand of providence knew how to lead 'the innocent' upon the mountain in a manner so natural that the

We both acted at 'Let's pretend'; and soon we had a heap of flowers of varying colours. The Angelus of the village was heard to strike, for the sky was clear, there being no clouds. After having spoken to the Good Lord what we had been taught, I said to Maxim that we should lead our cows on to a little plateau near a small ravine, where there were stones to build our 'Paradise'. We led our cows to the appointed spot, and there we took our little meal: afterwards we took some stones and pretended to build our little house, which consisted in a ground-floor, our so-called house, then a top-storey which was, as we said, 'Paradise'.

This stage was all garnished with flowers of varying colours, with crowns hanging from the stems of the flowers. This 'Paradise' was covered with a single great stone which we had covered over with flowers; we had also hung crowns about it. 'Paradise', being completed, we had a look at it; sleep came upon us; we went away about two paces from the place and fell fast asleep on the grass.

The Beautiful Lady sat upon our 'Paradise' without crushing it. (1)

(contd.) that the substituted shepherd who, tomorrow, will be cured and resume his place, will say with a charming ingenuity: "It's a good thing I have been ill! - How do I make that out? Well, I fell ill: if it had not been for that I would have seen the Holy Virgin! I am the man whom Maxim has displaced! Well, then, don't you see...during that very week he saw the Holy Virgin. Ah, Sir! but for that illness I am the man who would have seen the Holy Virgin!"

The young man in question was mild, even-tempered and devout. But the Mother of God had need of a good old scallywag like Maximin, who saw nothing in the Apparition, and did not even understand it.

(2) Since there is no question of any Beautiful Lady, the eagerness of Mélanie to point out this peculiarity shows her admiration for the goodness of the Holy Virgin, who thus testified that she had looked kindly on their bit of amusement.

II

Having awakened, and not seeing our cows, I called Maximin and climbed the little mound. From there I caught sight of our cows peacefully lying down. I went down again and Maximin went up. Suddenly I saw a clear light more brilliant than the sun, and was scarcely able to speak these words: "Maximin, look, down there! Ah! great God!" At the same time I let fall the stick I held in my hand. I don't know what delicious sensation passed through me at that moment, but I felt inspired. A great awe, shot through with love, fell upon me, and my heart wanted to run more quickly than myself.(1)

I looked fixedly upon this light which was motionless, and, just as it had been newly opened, I saw another light much more brilliant, which seemed to move, and in this light a Most Beautiful Lady was seated with her head in her hands. This Beautiful Lady had stood up: she gently crossed her arms as she looked at us and said: "Come forward, children, don't be afraid: I am here to bring you a great message." These sweet, kindly words made me fly towards her, and my heart would have inclined to cleave to her for ever. When we came near to the Beautiful Lady, that is to say, in front of her to her right, she began her discourse, and tears also commenced to flow from her beautiful eyes:

(1) Maxim's first impulse, however, was different. He had never seen the Apparition at all, and believed that Mélanie was afraid. "Come", he said, "take your stick", brandishing his own one with a threatening gesture, "If she touches us, I will fetch her a fine blow."

- Already the light had opened up: Mélanie immediately recognised the Holy Virgin, and was seized with fear. Indeed, she was almost in terror to see the Holy Virgin weeping, as she had never seen her, even in rapture.

"If my people do not wish to submit, I shall be compelled to loosen my grip on my Son's hand. It is so heavy and weighty that I can no longer keep it in check.

How long do I suffer for you people! If I have any wish that my Son should not abandon you, I am charged to pray for it without intermission. Yet you people don't seem to pay any heed at all. In vain might you pray; in vain might you do anything at all, for never will you manage to recompense the trouble I have taken on your behalf.

I gave you six days to work; reserving for myself the seventh. Yet you are unwilling to concede me that.(1) And that is the reason why my Son's hand is getting so weighty.

Carters cannot speak without taking the Name of my Son in vain. There you have the two things which are making my Son's hand so weighty.(2)

If the harvest is spoiled, it is nothing but simple justice, because of you people.

I have made you see this last year, so far as the potatoes are concerned; but you paid no attention. But it is a differnt business when the spoiled potatoes come along. For that is when you swear and take my Son's Name in vain. They will continue to go bad. At Christmastide there will be no more of them.

(1) The Holy Virgin speaks here in the name of God, and the Living Christ, whom she bears on her heart pronounced the words at the same time.

(2) Without the keeping of the Sabbath it is not possible to have any religious life. Fifteen centuries have passed since Tertullian repeated those words to the faithful of his own times: "But for the Sabbath, we cannot have any Christians. Non est christianus sine dominica."

Again, in the course of questions addressed by persecutors to the martyrs, we especially distinguish the following: "Do you observe the Sabbath?" and, on the reply in the affirmative, that is quite enough: for that was the point where Christianity was recognised in its entirety, so to speak. But the Holy Virgin reproached her people with a second crime, still more outrageous than the violation of the Sabbath - that is Blasphemy: When every mouth, not only does not pray, but blasphemes; when an entire people, as in France, not only forgets to worship God, but insults and denies Him. What punishments do they not deserve? "These are the two things which are making my Son's hand so weighty"

Here, I sought to interpret the word 'potatoes': I used to think that meant 'apples'. The Beautiful and Goodly Lady, divining my thought, thus replied:

"You don't understand children? Then I shall tell it you in another way."

The translation in French is as follows:

"If the harvest is spoiled it is nothing for you people; I made you see it last year, as far as the potatoes were concerned; but you paid no attention. It is a different business when the spoiled potatoes come along. You swear and take my Son's Name in vain. They will continue to go bad, and at Christmastide there will be no more of them.

If you have corn it will be impossible to sow it.

All you sow the beasts will eat; and what will come will fall to dust when you thresh it. A great famine will occur. Before the famine comes little children under seven years of age will take a shivering and will die in the hands of those who are looking after them.

Nuts will grow bad and grapes will rot!"(1)

Here, the beautiful Lady, who had entranced me, remained a moment without being heard, although I saw that she was continuing, as though speaking, to move her amiable lips graciously. Maximin then received his secret. Then, addressing me, the Most holy Virgin spoke to me and gave me a secret in French.

Here is the whole secret such as she gave it me:

(The words of the 'Secret' follow the somewhat copious footnote.)

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- (1) These threats were conditional: "If my people do not wish to submit." The movement of conversion which resulted after the Apparition did not suffice. The greater part of the things mentioned was realised to the letter.

The Holy Virgin had said the potatoes would continue to go bad and that at Christmastide there would be no more of them.

Now, since the beginning of winter, poor people were dying of hunger in the mountain. They hadn't even got a single potato to eat. It was the same throughout France and abroad, and especially in Ireland. All the newspapers for 21st January 1847 said:

'The resulting loss, for Ireland alone, from the failure of the of the potato harvest could be evaluated at £12 million sterling, that is, 300 million francs.' (Evening Gazette 28th Jan. 1847.)

This dearth having continued several years, the population of the island went down in 1866-1867 from 8 millions to 5 millions. These 3 millions of Irish either died or migrated abroad.

She had said that the corn would be eaten by beasts, and would fall to dust. Now, the disease of 'pictin' showed itself in 1851 and caused stupendous losses in Europe.

This is what a correspondent of l'Univers wrote on this corn-blight in the issue for 15th July, 1856:

'I opened the envelopes of dried chaff. The former did not enclose any grain; they are doubtless those which have been invaded first, and when the embryo was scarcely knit together. The latter did contain a dry, withered grain, which had no food value; these had been invaded later on. In both we found under the form of a yellow powder, small worms, which, doubtless, had caused all the pest. Anybody, to-day, can verify the same phenomenon: it only is required to go to the first field of corn, to take in your hands a few ears, to open the corollas masked to the root with a black spot, and you will see the creatures swarming....'

She said that a great famine would take place and that men would do penance by hunger. Now, in 1854-1855, corn was sold in France at 55 and 60 francs the hundred kilogram. According to statistics published by the Constitutionnel and l'Univers in 1856, the high price of living was to bring about in France the death of 152,000 persons for the two years 1854 and 1855, and of more than a million for the whole of Europe, according to other newspapers. And l'Univers for 12th Dec. 1856, added:

'Under this euphemism, Disease resulting from high costs, you should read Died of wretchedness and famine.'

We do not know the figure for 1856, but the cause has not disappeared.

In Spain the government bought wheat at 60 million réales, in order to escape the dearth. In Poland living was so dear, in 1856, that the Emperor of Russia augmented by a third the stipends of the officials.

She said that before the famine, little children would take a shivering and die in the hands of those who looked after them. Now, in 1847, the realisation of the threat made its appearance through a great infant-mortality in the canton of Corps. In 1854 there were 75 thousand children under 7 years of age who died of sweating-sickness in France. An icy cold seized them, followed by a shivering, which caused their death after two hours of suffering.

She said the nuts would grow bad. Now, a statement addressed to the Minister of the Interior in 1852 certified that a blight of walnut-trees had destroyed the harvest in Lymnais, just the year before. Beaujolais and Isère suffered the same fate. This was indeed a calamity for districts which depended upon harvesting nuts as one of their main resources.

She said that the grapes would rot. Now, the scourge is still persisting. The grapes have been getting rotten for nearly 60 years now.

Is not the fulfilment of the threats prophesied publicly, alone sufficient to warrant us saying: 'If La Salette is not an article of faith, it is an article of good faith; if La Salette is not a dogma, it is a stupendous grace from which we have not sufficiently profited?'

As we comment and meditate upon the Secret, verse by verse, we see that the threats prophesied, more numerous and much more serious than those in the public discourse, are plainly being fulfilled up to this day. This is the divine luminary, par excellence; for prophecy is not possible without God. It is manifest that He is above the power of creatures, not only to direct far-off events, but even to foresee these with certainty, when, as yet, their causes do not exist.

The great Apparition of La Salette has been cleared from all luminaries. Three years and a few months afterwards, M. the abbé Michel Perrin, in performing the duty of the pilgrimage, attested, with his pieces in his hand that more than 250 cures had been obtained by the invocation of Our Lady of La Salette. The fountain, which only 'flowed' at the melting of the snows, or following upon the great rains, and which has since resisted all drying up, is a permanent miracle.

A divine luminary, indeed! What examinations those children have to endure! Is it not miraculous to see two children who, only the day before, could not speak French, deliver a long discourse, without understanding, and explaining it easily in

that language? The most subtle examinations do not frighten them. They escape all the traps by means of clear and straightforward answers. Taken together, or taken separately, their stories correspond, complete and corroborate one another, and that on important details. Theologians confessed themselves beaten: lawyers and scholars, who at first regarded the matter rather airily, would presently have some misgivings in seeing too clearly into it. After one of these examinations Mélanie was asked:

- "My child, are you not wearied in repeating the same thing so often?"
- "No sir."
- "Yet, you must be wearied, especially when embarrassing questions are asked you?"
- "Sir, I am never asked embarrassing questions..."

Silence and stupefaction prevailed! All her examiners looked at one another. The embarrassment is now on the other side, for each of them had exerted himself to the uttermost in vain.

The abbé Dupanloup, who became Bishop of Orleans, confessed himself completely beaten by these two children.

"It must be taken into consideration," he wrote on 11th June, 1848. "that never in a court of justice have the accused been interrogated on a crime, as were these two poor little peasants over a period of two years on the Vision which they had to tell. Questioned on difficulties, often prepared in advance, sometimes long and cunningly pondered, they always countered with replies that were quick, short, clear precise and straightforward. You had the feeling that they would be totally incapable of so much readiness of mind unless all they had to say was the truth. They have been seen to have been led, as you would have led malefactors to the same place, either of their revelation or of their imposture: but people of the most distinguished bearing and importance could not disconcert them, neither threats nor insults could frighten them, neither kisses nor gentleness could make them bend, neither could the most prolonged cross-examination tire them out, nor the frequent repetition of all these tests find them in contradiction, whether taken separately or taken together."

This supernatural help persisted all through their life.

A clever professor of theology and his friend, a curé in a great city, came over to La Salette with a dozen objections prepared and studied in advance, to tackle Maximin when he came from his work-shop. He came, at the request of the pilgrims, who preferred to interview him rather than the missionaries, to tell the story of the miracle. When Maximin had finished his exposition, the professor put forward his first objection. Maximin merely said: "Let's have the second." He put the same query to the 2nd, 3rd, 4th and 5th objections. Maximin then replied in a few words. He crushed the five objections, and this demolishing involved the other seven as well. Seeing this, the professor and the curé said to us - for we were sitting near them: "This young man is ever upon his mission: he is helped by the Holy Virgin to-day as he was in the first days. That is quite apparent to us. No theologian, supposing he were the most intelligent in the world, could have put up such a master-stroke. Most certainly it is a superhuman feat. He has verified the miracle for us more conclusively than the most cogent demonstrations would have been able to do." (Amédée Nicolas.)

All those divine signs don't go for nothing, when we consider the wonders of grace that have been wrought in human souls. The conversion of sinners and their restoration to Jesus - such is the end of the Apparition of La Salette, and such was the effect in all places where it was understood. Was it not miraculous to note, at the telling of these children's story, the conversion of crowds, who had received them at first with every kind of prejudice and often with scorn? From the first year the district of Corps was completely renovated. Not only was no more blaspheming heard, not only was no one seen working on the sabbath, but everyone went to Church, and since 1847, nearly everybody communicated at Easter. Thus, at Corps, with a population of 1,800 inhabitants, there were not thirty persons who neglected this important duty.

But why listen to us on such a divine Sign, when anyone can impute a superior authority, namely that of the Holy Church. If La Salette is not an article of faith, it is an article of good faith; if it is not a dogma, it is a grace from which we have not sufficiently profited.

THE SECRET OF LA SALETTE

(19th September 1846.)

I caught sight of a very Beautiful Lady sitting down, with her head in her hands. This Beautiful Lady rose up and lightly crossed her arms, while she looked at us and said: "Come forward, children, don't be afraid: I am here to announce a great piece of news to you." These sweet, gentle words made me fly towards her, and my heart would have inclined to cleave to her for ever. Having come quite close to the Beautiful Lady, in front of her and to her right, she begins her discourse, while tears start to flow from her beautiful eyes at the same time:

- (1) Mélanie, what I am going to tell you now, will not always be a secret. You may publish it in 1858.
- (2) The priests, my Son's servants, the priests, I say, by their wicked lives, by their lack of reverence and devotion in celebrating the sacred mysteries, by their love of money, their love of honour and pleasure, have become cess-pools of impurity. Yes, the priests ask for vengeance and vengeance is hanging over their heads. Woe to the priests and to the people consecrated to God, who by their infidelity and their evil life, crucify my Son afresh! The sins of the people consecrated to God cry towards heaven and call down vengeance; and here is vengeance upon their very door-step, for no longer is anyone found to implore mercy and pardon for the people. No more can any generous souls be found. No longer can a single person be found worthy of offering the spotless Victim to the Almighty in favour of the world.
- (3) God is going to strike in an unexampled manner.
- (4) Woe to the inhabitants of the earth! God's anger is almost exhausted, and no-one will be able to escape from so many evils, all falling at the same time.
- (5) The Leaders and directors of God's people have neglected prayers and penitence, and the devil has darkened their minds. They have become wandering stars, which the old devil will drag

- (5)(contd.) with his tail in order to cause their perdition. God will allow the old serpent to put divisions among the ruling powers, in all societies and in all families; both physical and moral ills will be suffered; God will abandon them to themselves, and will send punishments which will succeed one another for more than thirty-five years.
- (6) The Community is on the threshold of the most terrible scourges and of the most momentous happenings: you must expect to be ruled by a rod of iron, and to drink the cup of God's wrath.
- (7) See that the Vicar of my Son, the Sovereign Pontiff Pius IX goes no longer from Rome after the year 1859, but that he be strong and liberal, so that he may fight with the arms of faith and love. I will be with him.
- (8) Let him put no faith in Napoleon: his heart is double, and when he wants to be Pope and Emperor at once, God will immediately withdraw from him: he is that eagle which, desirous always of ascending, will fall upon the very sword he wanted to use, in order to compel the peoples to get him lifted up.
- (9) Italy will be punished for its ambition in wishing to shake the yoke of the Lord of Lords; she, too, will be delivered over to warfare; blood will flow from all sides; churches will be closed or desecrated; priests and religious leaders will be shot, they will be done to death and die a cruel death. Many will forsake the faith, and great will be the number of priests and religious leaders who will give up the true religion - even bishops will be found among these people.
- (10) Let the Pope be on his guard against miracle-mongers, for the time has come when the most astonishing wonders will take place on the earth and in the air.
- (11) In the year 1864, Lucifer, along with a great number of devils will be released from Hell: they will abolish the Faith little by little, doing this even among persons consecrated to God: they will blind them in such a manner that but for a particular grace, these persons would take on the spirit of wicked angels; a good deal of religious houses will lose the Faith completely, and many souls will be lost.

- (12) Evil books will be plentiful on the earth, and spirits of darkness will spread abroad everywhere a universal slackening for all which concerns the service of God; they will have very great power over nature; there will be churches to serve these spirits. People will be transported from one place to another by these evil spirits, and even priests, because they are not guided by the good spirit of the Gospel, which is the spirit of humility, of charity, and of zeal for the glory of God. The dead and the righteous will be brought to life. There will be in all places extraordinary marvels because the true Faith is extinguished, and because the false light illumines the world. Woe to the princes of the Church who will not occupy themselves save to amass riches upon riches, and to safeguard their authority and dominate in a prideful manner.
- (13) The Vicar of my Son will have much to suffer, because, for a time, the Church will be delivered over to great persecutions: this will be the time of darkness: the Church will pass through a frightful crisis.
- (14) The sacred faith of God being forgotten, each individual will wish to be a law unto himself, and to be above those who are like him. Civil and ecclesiastical powers will be abolished; all order and all justice will be trampled underfoot; there will be seen only homicides, hate, jealousy, lying and discord, without love for fatherland or for family.
- (15) The Holy Father will suffer much. I will be with him to the very end to receive his sacrifice.
- (16) Wicked people will make several attempts on his life, without being able to cut short his days. But neither he nor his successors will see the triumph of the Church of God.
- (17) The civil governments will all have the same plan, which will be to abolish and cause to disappear all religious principles in order to make room for materialism, for atheism, for spiritism and all kinds of vices.
- (18) In the year 1865 abominations will be seen in sacred places: in convents the flowers of the Church will be putrified, and the devil will become the king of hearts. Let those who are at the head of religious communities be on their guard regarding people whom they must receive, for the devil will make use of all his guile to introduce into religious orders people addicted to sin: for disorderliness and love of carnal pleasure will be broadcast throughout the land.

- (19) France, Italy, Spain and England will be at war: blood will flow in the streets. Frenchman will fight against Frenchman, Italian against Italian: then there will be general war which will be a horrible thing. For a time God will not remember France any more, nor yet Italy, for the Gospel of Jesus Christ will be known no longer. The wicked will deploy all their guile, people will kill each other and massacre each other, even inside their own houses.
- (20) At the first blow of his lightning sword, the mountains and the whole earth will tremble with horror, because the unruliness and crimes of men will pierce the vault of heaven. Paris will be burnt and Marseilles swallowed up: several big towns will be shaken and swallowed up by the tremors of the earth: it will be thought that everything is lost. Nothing but homicides will be seen, nothing but the noise of arms, and blasphemy will be heard. The righteous will suffer much; their prayers, their penitence and their tears will ascend to heaven itself and all the people of God will ask for pardon and mercy, and for my help and intercession. Then Jesus Christ, by an act of His great righteousness, and mercy for the righteous, will order His angels to put to death all his enemies. Suddenly, the persecutors of the Church and Jesus Christ, and all the men addicted to sin will perish, and the earth will become like unto a wilderness. Then peace will be made, the reconciliation of God with men: Jesus Christ will be served, adored and glorified: Charity will everywhere flourish. The new ways will be the right hand of the Holy Church, which will be strong, humble, devout, poor, zealous and imitative of the virtues of Jesus Christ. The Gospel will everywhere be preached, and men will make great progress in the Faith, because there will be unity among the workers of Jesus Christ, and because men will live in the fear of God.
- (21) This peace among men will not last long: twenty-five years of abundant harvest will cause them to forget that the sins of men are the cause of all the pains which take place on earth.
- (22) A forerunner of the Anti-Christ with his forces of many nations will fight against the true Christ, the one and only Saviour of God, in order to get himself looked upon as a God.

- (23) The earth will be shaken with all manner of plagues (to say nothing of pestilence and famine, which will be common); there will be wars until the final war, which will then be waged by the ten kings of the Antichrist. These kings will all have the same purpose and will be the only ones who will govern the world. Nothing will occupy people's minds save amusing themselves. The wicked will apply themselves to all manner of sins, but the children of the Holy Church, the children of Faith, my true followers, will grow in the love of God and in the virtues which are dearest to my heart. Blessed are the humble souls who are led by the Holy Spirit! I shall fight with them until they come to the consummation of the age.
- (24) Nature demands vengeance for men, and it shudders with horror as it awaits what must surely happen on an earth which is so defiled with crimes.
- (25) Tremble O earth, and you who make profession of serving Jesus Christ, and who inwardly worship yourselves, tremble, I say, for God is about to deliver you to His enemy, because the holy places are lying in corruption. Many convents are no longer houses of God, but are the pastures of Asmodée and her satellites.
- (26) It will be during these times that the Antichrist will be born of a Hebrew devotée, a false virgin who will have communication with the old serpent, that master of impurity. Antichrist's father will be Ev; even from his birth he will spew forth blasphemies. Possessing teeth, he will utter fearful cries, and, in a word, he will be the devil incarnate. As a worker of miracles, he will feed on nothing but impurities. He will have brothers, who, although they might not be fiends incarnate, will still be children of evil. At twelve years of age those brothers will be noted for the valiant victories they will win, and soon each of them will be at the head of armies, helped by the legions of hell.
- (27) The seasons will be changed, the earth only bringing forth evil fruits. The stars will lose their regular movements, while the moon will only reflect a feeble, reddish light. Water and fire will give to the terrestrial globe convulsive movements and horrible earth-tremors, which will cause mountains to swallow up whole towns.
- (28) Rome will lose her faith and will become the seat of Antichrist.

- (29) Demons of the air along with Antichrist will work mighty miracles on the earth and in the air, and men will pervert one another more and more. God, however, will take care of His faithful servants and men of good will. The Gospel will be preached everywhere, and all peoples and nations will be brought to the knowledge of the truth.
- (30) I am making an urgent appeal to the earth. I am calling upon the true disciples of the living God, who reigns in Heaven above. I am calling upon the real followers of Christ made man, the only true Saviour of man. I am calling upon my children who are really sincere, those who have given themselves to me so that I can lead them to My divine Son, those whom I carry, so to speak, in My arms, those who have lived by My spirit. In short, I am calling upon the Apostles of the latter times, the faithful disciples of Jesus Christ, who have lived in scorn of the world and of themselves, in poverty and humility, in scorn and in silence, in prayer and mortification, in chastity and in union with God, in suffering and unknown to the world.
- Come and show yourselves as My dear children. I am with you and in you, provided that your faith is the light which illumines you in these days of ill fortune. May your zeal make you athirst for the glory and honour of Jesus Christ. Fight, children of light, you small number who see it all coming, for this is the time of times, the end of ends.
- (31) The Church will be eclipsed and the world will be in consternation. But, behold, Enoch and Elijah will come, filled with the spirit of God. They will preach with God's own strength, and men of good will shall believe in God, while many souls will be comforted. They will make great progress by virtue of the Holy Spirit and will condemn the diabolic errors of Antichrist.
- (32) Woe to the inhabitants of the earth! There will be bloody wars and famine, pestilences and contagious diseases. There will be rains and fearful hail upon live-stock. Thunderbolts will shake cities and earth-tremors will swallow up countries. Voices will be heard in the air. Men will batter their heads against the wall, calling upon death, and, indeed, death will be their portion, for blood will flow from all sides. Who, then, will be able to gain the victory, unless God shortens the time of trial? By the blood, tears and prayers of the righteous, God will be prevailed upon to relent. Enoch and Elijah will be put to death. Pagan Rome will disappear. The fire of Heaven will

- (32) (Contd.) fall and consume three towns, striking the whole universe with terror, and many will let themselves be seduced because they have not worshipped the true Christ who is living among them. The time has come: the sun will be darkened: faith alone will survive.
- (33) Behold, the time has indeed come: the abyss is opening up. Behold, the King of the kings of darkness. Behold, the Beast with his subjects, calling himself the saviour of the world. He will rise arrogantly in the air to go as far as Heaven itself! But, choked by the breath of the Archangel Saint Michael, he will fall to the ground, and the earth, which for three days has been in continual disturbance, will open its bosom with fiery heat to receive him. Then will he be plunged for ever, with all who belong to him, into the eternal abyss of Hell. Water and fire will then purify the earth and consume all the works of men's pride and everything will be renewed. And thus will God be served and glorified.

The Holy Virgin was weeping nearly all the time she was speaking. Her tears flowed slowly one by one to her knees; then, like sparks of light, they disappeared. They were brilliant and full of love...The tears of our tender Mother, far from lessening her majestic mien, as Queen and as Mistress, seemed on the contrary to embellish her, making her more amiable, more beautiful, more powerful, more overflowing with love, more maternal, more entrancing. For myself, I could well have swallowed those tears, which made my heart leap with compassion and love...

(Narrative of Mélanie Calvat, Shepherdess of
La Salette, written in 1878.)

CHAPTER 6

MARRIAGE

In this chapter we shall be contemplating the almost solitary compensating factor that mitigated the hard lot of the Pilgrim through this world, which was for him at any rate, 'a vale of tears.' At the same time, we shall consider the place of the tender emotions in his life, especially in their relationship with women.

To some extent there is a marked similarity between Bloy's problem and Kierkegaard's. In one of his very early works, Le Révélateur du Globe, the author makes the pregnant remark:

"When we are not speaking to God or for God, it is to the Devil we are speaking, and he hears us...in a formidable silence."
(1)

This statement may be compared with Kierkegaard's:

"Everyone should be chary about having to do with 'the others', and should essentially speak only with God and with himself." (2)

No doubt 'the others', mentioned by the gloomy Dane were just as diabolical as Bloy's Devil. For immersion in 'the others' would bring about a 'mediocring of the soul', giving it that sinister quality which Bloy designates as 'cochons' (swine): and that would be the worst thing that any Devil could accomplish.

The aim of both the Protestant and Catholic thinkers is to achieve the position of the Single One before God. The travail to pass through the narrow pass and really to become the Single One is recorded in the whole corpus of the works they have left behind.

"I myself do not assert myself," says Kierkegaard, "that I am that one. For I have fought for it, indeed, but have not yet grasped it, and am in the continued fight continually reminded that

(1) See Part III, Ch.1 p.192 of this work

(2) Quoted by Buber in Between Man and Man p.50

it is beyond human strength to be 'the Single One' in the highest sense." (1)

And all the books written by the French Catholic are but an endorsement of the Danish Protestant's words.

Yet, though intellectually the problem may be the same, emotionally, the Dane and the Frenchman are at opposite poles when they set out to solve the problem. Largely, perhaps, the emotional approach was determined by the religious tradition which they respectively inherited. The burden of Kierkegaard's message is the Renunciation of the World in order to secure the Love of God. The crystallization of his thought is summed up in his renunciation of his earthly love, Regina Olsen.

Faced with the dichotomy: God, or the world? Kierkegaard placed his fiancée on the side of 'the world'. It may be that this was an unfortunate 'hang-over' from a Calvinistic attitude to sex which has given rise to a certain pedantic prudery in Protestant countries. With his Catholic background, however, containing as it does the significant inculcation of the Veneration of the Virgin, Bloy placed his fiancée on the side of 'God'. In this respect he was vastly nearer to the teaching of Jesus than the Danish thinker. The Master combined the two commandments: 'Love God with all thy might', and 'Love thy neighbour as thyself', into one glowing synthesis. By bringing these two things together, Jesus brings to light the truth that God and man are not rivals. God must be loved in His creatures not apart from them.

This is the gulf that separates Sören Kierkegaard from Léon Bloy.

(1) See Between Man and Man p.49

"In order to come to love," says Kierkegaard about his renunciation of Regina Olsen, "I had to remove the object." (1)

Now, as Martin Buber says:

"That is sublimely to misunderstand God. Creation is not a hurdle on the way to God; it is the road itself. We are created along with one another and directed to a life with one another. Creatures are placed in my way so that I, their fellow-creature, by means of them and with them find the way to God. A God reached by their exclusion would not be the God of all lives in whom all life is fulfilled. A God in whom only the parallel lines of single approaches intersect is more akin to the 'God of the philosophers' than the God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob. God wants us to come to Him by means of the Reginas He has created and not by the renunciation of them. If we remove the object, then - we have removed the object altogether. Without an object, artificially producing the object from the abundance of the human spirit and calling it God, this love has its being in the void." (2)

What a healthy contrast there is to this morbid renunciation, given in the warm, pulsating pages of Bloy's Lettres à sa Fiancée. This is what he writes to his beloved in one of his early letters:

"You have written to me that I love God more than you. My beloved child, what do you know about it? I couldn't write that to you because it would be impossible for me to make that division. I love God in you, through you, because of you, and I love you perfectly in God, as a Christian should love his betrothed; the idea of dividing in any way this beautiful flame of love doesn't come into the orbit of my mind. Let us love each other, my little Jeanne with all simplicity and without any pointless analysis. Let us love each other in the way that God wishes, and let us not be frightened of the Love which is the very name of the Holy Ghost, and let us thus courageously await the will of Him who made us for His Glory and who did not drag us out of nothingness from the desire to torture us." (3)

In another letter he writes: "Oh! Lord Jesus! how happy we shall be when we are in solitude, occupied solely in loving each other in God and in working for our brothers while studying the Scriptures." (4)

Surely Lettres à sa Fiancée must be something wholly unique in all literature, whether secular or sacred. Many a young man in his early twenties might envy the whole-hearted, enthusiastic passion which is poured forth in these wonderful letters. Yet when they were written

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- (1) Between Man and Man p.52
(2) Ibid p.52
(3) Letters to his Fiancée p.17
(4) Ibid p.54

Bloy was a seasoned veteran of forty-three, and he cannot in any way be acquitted of having been shipwrecked more than once in his ungovernable love "towards the porcelain creatures shaped to the divine Resemblance." (1) Bolley is quite right when he says:

"Dealing with Léon Bloy, everything is explained by Love: his weaknesses and his greatness, his violence and his gentleness, his blasphemy and his prayer, his falls and his rising up, human and superhuman." (2)

Bloy himself confesses:

"I have set the whole of my life in love, divine love and human love which I have sometimes strangely confused with one another. I have only lived for that, without having ever understood that one can live for anything else." (3)

He even goes so far as to equate 'Love' and 'Divine', when he says: "Whatever may be the sound destined by its nature to notify to my understanding the idea of 'divine', I absolutely refuse to listen to, to read or to conceive any other thing save the word 'Love'... Wisdom, strength, power, justice have for me no other sound or colour, and if a critic appeared to judge the author of Le Désespéré, he would require to call him "the blasphemer by love". For there does exist a holy anger, and it is all the more holy because it is hot against God Himself, against the Lord God who sollicits it groaningly, this fury of love, in a surprising passage from Ezekiel." (4)

On another occasion, when he wrote to the poet Alcide Guérin, whom he immortalised as the Hercule Joly of La Femme Pauvre, he said:

"A pupil of Calvary, I have become a blasphemer by love." (5)

This love, then, so palpably human which Bloy admitted was confused somewhat with divine love, led the poor writer into a few tangles in his relationship with the other sex. We have already outlined one of the chief tangles in our chapter on Véronique. Prominent among others was his liaison with Berthe Dumont, who figures as Clotilde in the first part of La Femme Pauvre. The year 1885-6, during which Le Désespéré made its first appearance, was the most

(1) Le Désespéré p.55

(2) Léon Bloy: (Essai de biographie) Vol.1. p.124

(3) Ibid p.122

(4) Ibid pp.122-123

(5) Ibid p.232

sinister and heart-rending period in a life that was surfeited with sorrows, sufferings and disappointments of all kind. The unfortunate Berthe died of tetanus with unspeakable suffering, and Bloy lived for a time with her mother and supported her with difficulty out of his extreme poverty. Bollery gives some idea of the pathetic situation in his biography:

"It was a time of infinite distress of heart, material wretchedness, the impotence of any human consolations and of Religion itself, perpetual search after work or for expedients to subsist on, hope alternating with hope deceived, a feeling of complete failure, threats from creditors, humiliations, rebuffs, hopeless errands - nothing was spared the patient in his achievement of the title Le Désespéré."(1)

In spite of his afflictions, it is to the credit of Léon Bloy that he did not make his miseries an excuse for evading any of the obligations which the fervour of his love brought upon him.

One other unhappy episode remains to be told of, something which occurred about two years before his marriage with Jeanne Molbeck in 1890 brought him final peace in his relations with women. Chapter Twenty-one of Le Désespéré shows quite clearly that a terrific desire for parenthood seemed to be afflicting the author. There is no record in his life that he actually was a father at the time, but in his book he 'invented' a child born in tragic circumstances, whose death at five years of age is shrouded in mystery. Truly, this must have been a case of coming events casting their shadows before. For in a letter to the Montchals, he makes this confession regarding what happened in 1888:

"My dear little Maurice is much more a child of pity than of love. Here, let me make an appeal to the superiority of your

(1) Léon Bloy; (Essai de biographie) Vol.11. p.164

liberal spirit. A woman who is common or a prude would not understand. The mother is a poor girl, simple and rough-and-ready, whom I have known for quite a few years and whom I have got out of a hole many a time. Our relations were on a very friendly footing and moreover, they were rather infrequent and showed no love on either side. When I was ill two years ago and nailed to my bed, I made her come along, and she looked after me with the patience and absolute devotion of a good dog. There happened then what must have happened. You know what a moment of affection can bring forth? I love this child passionately and I dream unceasingly about him. I will finish my work with a perfect joy right to the end, without counting the cost, but I will not marry the mother, whose fine qualities I can vouch for pretty well - for she is very much below me, educationally. Let me add that I owe her nothing, having taken nothing from her, for she was a pitiable creature, seduced and abandoned. She will always receive my help, as she does to-day, with a good will and a perfect fidelity, and our child will be my child, That is all." (1)

The woman, of course, never even distantly imagined that she would ever wear the wedding-ring. To her ignorant mind a 'favour' had been conferred upon her by one of her 'betters'. Not that that in any way mitigates the folly of the wretched Bloy! Poor Maurice did live a little longer than the child of fiction, reaching the age of twelve before he passed away.

Now Léon Bloy was not a man who would seek to inveigle anybody, whether man or woman, by false pretences. No matter what he did or what he said, he was a person of transparent sincerity. In his talks with Jeanne Molbeck, therefore, he made no attempt to whitewash his character, and it says a great deal for the daughter of the Danish poet that she was prepared to love and to understand this stormy petrel whom she first met in the Coppée household.

In her revealing introduction to Lettres à sa Fiancée she says of him: "I had no idea of his real worth! I thank God for having hidden it from me. It was only the grandeur emanating from him which won me, his ignominy in the eyes of others that

(1) Léon Bloy: (Essai de biographie) Vol.11. p.290

attracted me,
/his gentleness that ravished my heart. At no moment of our life did his goodness fail and I affirm that the injustice done to him as a man and as a writer is monstrous." (1)

She gives a memorable picture of her future husband at her first interview:

"The first time that I was alone with Léon Bloy was on a certain evening at the Coppées with whom I was staying at the outset of our acquaintance.

The old servant re-introduced us and we began to talk. All the time he was dipping a piece of bread into the wine that Augustine had given him. "Mademoiselle," he said to me, "You are watching me dine." I had never been in close contact with the Poor, I am ashamed to say, and the idea that someone really lacked sufficiency for dinner was new to me. I sat in an armchair near to him, and then began that unforgettable conversation. It was almost a monologue in which this extraordinary naïf man told the secrets of his life to a poor girl who didn't even know how to listen but whose heart went out to him with an irresistible bound, in spite of its shyness." (2)

A striking feature which marks the chequered career of the French Catholic - especially as it is viewed by a Protestant brought up in a country with Calvinistic tradition - is the fact that the vagaries of sex-love in the life of Bloy did not unduly disfigure his religious experience. Too often in Protestant churches misdemeanours in sex amount almost to the unforgiveable sin. So much so that great harm is done, not only to the sinners after the flesh, who, although repentant, find the greatest difficulty in achieving rehabilitation among their fellow-worshippers, but to the "self-righteous" themselves, who are apt to preen themselves on their own superiority, thereby incurring far more danger to their immortal souls by committing the sin of spiritual arrogance than to the souls of their despised brethren. It is, indeed, a wholesome tonic to read of Jeanne Molbeck's reception of Bloy, in his entirety, as he was - weaknesses, shady spots, everything - and offer him that

(1) Letters to his Fiancée. Introduction.

(2) Ibid Introduction.

love which was to be his comfort and resting-place throughout the remainder of a career condemned to continue troubled and dolorous right on to the bitter end.

This marriage with the eldest daughter of Christian Molbeck was a literal god-send to the Catholic writer, though it was frowned upon by many of Bloy's associates, who did their best to dissuade him from it. In a letter to Henry de Groux, a few years after the wedding he writes:

"My marriage was certainly an act of folly in the eyes of men, But it was at the same time an act willed by God: it is thereby demonstrated that I could not have accomplished through it anything more reasonable or wholesome (savour)." (1)

In a letter to Oluf Molbeck (Jeanne's brother) dated March 26, 1890, he says:

"Our love is profoundly reasonable and in conformity with perfect justice. We see clearly that our two hearts and our two minds correspond and complement one another in admirable fashion. Moreover, we met one another just at the moment when that encounter was necessary; she being tired after a struggle that had no object, almost bereft of hope and I shattered by a terrible existence, three-quarters buried in the pit of despair. If I had had any doubt of the existence of God and believed like so many other vain spirits that the world revolves by chance, the astonishing Fatherly beauty of this providential turn of events would have sufficed, I am convinced, to have restored me to the Faith." (2)

A great deal is learnt as to what the Catholic Faith meant to Léon Bloy, when we remember that he desired his well-beloved to enter the marriage contract on an equal footing with himself, that is, as a convinced Catholic. Many a man falls in love with a girl belonging to a different religious persuasion, but often the religious issue does not arise in any crucial way. Not infrequently the respective parties agree to take their own traditional faith, or, perhaps one or the other capitulates to the stronger minded,

(1) Léon Bloy (biographie) Vol. II. p.347.
(2) Ibid. P.348.

for the sake of convenience or the price of peace at home.

This was not the way of Léon Bloy. He was not the one who would allow himself to be "unequally yoked", when it was the sacrament of holy marriage that had to be considered. Yet he was the last person who would have desired a conversion that was coerced in any way. He had far too great a respect for the soul to attempt that. As he says in the letter quoted above to Jeanne's brother:

"Her reason is too vigorous and her will too exacting to let herself be surprised. She has not become a Catholic because she loved me: she loved me on the contrary because there has been in her for a long time a mysterious bias which was bringing her round to Catholicism." (1)

He takes exception, in a letter to Henry Carton de Wiart, to the complaint made rather bitterly against his personal influence in Molbeck's daughter's conversion to Catholicism by the Protestant pastors of Denmark. Nevertheless that does not prevent him from glorying in the triumph of such a signal trophy of grace. He writes:

"The conquest of a soul so extraordinary and so enkindled with my soul is the certain sign of my forthcoming enlargement." (2)

In one of the last-written letters to his fiancée before their marriage Bloy seems to be weaning the Danish girl from the last contaminating influence which Kierkegaard, her fellow-Protestant and countryman, would seek to exercise over her on the subject of the connotation of "love". The writer of Sickness unto Death, of course, would not be on her mind at the time, even supposing she had heard of him, but no doubt similar tendencies of thought would be playing upon her as played upon the religious thinker earlier in the century. This is what the doughty

(1) Leon Bloy (biographie) Vol.11. p.348.

(2) Ibid P.340.

Catholic writes to his lady, who is turning from the Protestant faith of her fathers:

"I have surprised and sometimes even hurt you a little by speaking of our love - and mine in particular - and laying a slight emphasis on the physical side with hypocrites separate so carefully from the spiritual. It is conceivable that I have sometimes gone too far. But my little white lamb, you must remember that I had to take your education in hand when I promised to be your doctor. We had to think of everything because we are both spirit and flesh. I wanted you to become altogether my wife, a wife without any prejudices and a wife that can really be called a Christian. Before we are united it is necessary that in marriage you should be for me a Christian companion inspiring holy respect at the same time as a mistress inspiring holy adoration. Wives who do not understand that never make their husbands happy and neither are they happy themselves. (Italics mine)

Moreover they understand nothing of the spirit of our Maternal, infallible and divine Church.

...It is true that we have gone through some weak moments against which we could hardly defend ourselves. God, whose ways are wonderful, has used these moments to humiliate us and to increase our love. But we have been well looked after and - well, we shall stand before the altar without having to blush at the memory of a single grave fault. We shall be exactly as we ought to be and we shall exchange the wedding ring with pure hearts." (1)

In spite of all the ups and downs of a love, so human and so divine, which he confused so remarkably, Bloy held a very elevated conception of marriage:

"Now listen," he writes to his bride-to-be, "it is an extraordinary destiny I assure you, and there will be no lack of prudent people who will tell you to be wiser.

If it were not ridiculous to discuss hypothetical events that have not happened and that therefore could not happen, one might imagine you meeting instead of me, some other man - fairly intelligent, fairly good, fairly rich, fairly in love with you, who would have wooed you honourably and whom you would have finally married for the sake of peace and quiet and to have a decent position.

You would have married then without any enthusiasm on your part and merely because you would have thought it was God's will: you would have fulfilled your new duties as well as possible but with a frozen zeal - like a hundred thousand others.

And what duties Jeanne! The gift of oneself without love is surely the most ghastly devastation?

Ah! I assure you I have many ideas on that subject - and so terrible that I think no one can have thought of them before me.

(1) Letters to his Fiancée pp.161f.

You would think that the social laws founded on Christianity ought to rule my thoughts sovereignly, wouldn't you? Marriage as it has been practised for better or for worse throughout the centuries of the universe has been an instrument for the restriction of debauchery and for the propagation of our unhappy species: to this end two people have been united by God, who were, I suppose both willing, and of whom one supplied generous rectitude while the other offered heroic resignation - and this in order to fulfil a law of the divine order: - again I say, you would think that that should seem to me the most respectable and holy of realities. Well, then, no: a thousand times no! I am so made that it seems to me intolerable, monstrously intolerable from the point of view of the woman, if love is lacking. From a man's point of view, it is infinitely different, as you will ultimately understand, because you must be wedded to my thoughts at the same time as you are marrying my person." (1)

Later on, in La Femme Pauvre he was to develop this theme in more detail. The passage is found on page 111 of that book, but we give the translation as it is found in the English anthology selected by Mme Maritain:

"Women are universally convinced that everything is their due. This belief lies within their nature just as a triangle is inscribed in the circumference it determines. Beautiful or ugly, slave or empress, each woman has the right to presume herself the WOMAN. Not one escapes this marvellous instinct for preserving the sceptre whose titular mankind still awaits.

That awful pedant Schopenhauer, who spent his life studying the horizon from the bottom of a well, was certainly incapable of suspecting the supernatural origin of that feeling of dominion which casts the strongest men under the feet of women, and the brutishness of our day has unhesitatingly glorified this blasphemer against Love.

Against Love, indeed, for a woman cannot be or believe herself to be anything other than Love itself, and the earthly Paradise, which the Don Juans of every estate have sought for so many centuries is her prodigious Image.

Thus for a woman, a creature temporarily, provisionally inferior, there are but two aspects, two essential modalities, to which the Infinite must necessarily accommodate itself. Beatitude or Voluptuousness. Between these two there is only the Respectable Woman, that is the female of the Bourgeois, the absolutely damned, whom no holocaust can redeem.

A woman saint may fall into the mire and a prostitute may ascend into light, but never will either of them be able to become a respectable woman - because this appalling barren cow known as the respectable woman, she who but lately refused the hospitality of Bethlehem to the Infant God, is eternally powerless to escape from her nothingness, either by falling low or

mounting high.

Yet they all have a common trait, a calm assumption of their dignity as dispensers of Joy. Causa nostrae laetitiae! Janua caeli! (cause of our joy! Gate of heaven!) God alone can know in what fashion at times, these sacred formularies become fused in the meditations of the purest among them, and what their mysterious physiology suggests to them!...

All women - whether they know it or are unaware of it - are convinced that their bodies are Paradise. Plantaverat autem paradisi voluptatis a principio: in quo posuit hominem quem formaverat. (And the Lord God had planted a paradise of pleasure from the beginning: wherein he placed man whom he had formed.)

Consequently no prayer, no penance, no martyrdom have a sufficient impetrative power to obtain that inestimable jewel which the weight of diamonds of all the nebulae could not pay for.

Here now is the conclusion, drawn from the Prophets: Woman is RIGHT to believe all this and claim all this. She is infinitely right, since her body - that part of her body! - was the tabernacle of the Living God, and no one, not even an archangel, can set limits to the solidarity of this baffling mystery!" (1)

Bloy crystallizes his thoughts about marriage in the two following statements which are quoted in Résurrection: Léon Bloy.

"A poor creature who falls into the gulf of prostitution, through sheer despair deserves assuredly a limitless pity, but a virgin who gets married through reason commits a fearful deed, which places her far below any prostitutes - prodigiously below the vilest prostitutes - and which gives the wicked archangels a fright." (2)

"What is called by the bourgeois 'a marriage of convenience' is a horror, a sacrilege, a prostitution with no excuse. The initial stages of conjugal life, the act of possession, that is to say if we are to suppose it apart from love - an absolutely ordinary circumstance in our pretty Christian society - is an abomination which can putrify the whole of life, and which must spiritually contaminate the children that are born of such unions. nothing can possibly be more serious." (3)

From the stern, rigorous point of view of the Calvinist, such an interpretation of the tender emotions, especially in their connection with the most intimate of all-sex-relationships, is apt to cause consternation and not a little trepidation for

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- (1) Léon Bloy: Pilgrim of the Absolute. pp.307-8
 (2) Résurrection: Léon Bloy. p.123.
 (3) Ibid. p.123-4.

the sacred inviolability of the marriage-bond. Fundamentally, of course, Bloy is on the side of the angels. If we follow Love as a guiding light all the way through - pure, undiluted, fervent love - we are bound to behave as loving children of a Loving God. Yet, confusing as he does human love and divine love, Bloy cannot be accepted here as the best of all teachers on the subject.(1) Probably one who suffered so much through the impetuosity of his emotions could have done to have sat at the feet of a master like Prof. Nygren of Upsala, who in his significant writings brings out the distinction between Eros and Agape with wonderful clarity of thought.(2) Knowing the irregularities of Bloy's appallingly wretched life in Paris before he reached the haven of his marriage in the middle forties, we realise that the major blunder he committed was his more or less unconscious confounding of the psycho-physiological and the ethical elements of the raging love which was consuming his heart. Through such blunders and shortcomings, such falls and risings of the erotic predispositions, he was ultimately brought into the fuller light of New Testament Agape. At the same time it must never be forgotten that his agonising struggles were constantly touched by the fitful beams of Agape's sun, until he emerged at last into the full radiance of the noon-tide light.

The sense of the Irrevocable which we are to develop more fully later on in a chapter under that title, possessed Bloy wholly when Jeanne Molbeck crossed his path. This was no chance encounter. This

(1) "We should be alive to the consequence of exposing young adolescents in their most impressionable years to views about sex and marriage which are often directly opposed to the moral law." Moral Crisis: Their Church in action. C.of E. Publicns, Oct.1950

(2) See Eros and Agape Vol.1. A Study of the Christian Idea of Love and Vol.11. A History of the Christian Idea of Love.

was a woman sent from God - a partner in life foreordained from all eternity. The lady of his choice and God's choice, then accorded Le Désespéré all her love and affection and the intelligence of heart, the understanding, the total approbation and unreserved admiration of which he stood in imperious and constant need. The noble girl from the North accepted heroically, passionately her share of the sufferings of the proscribed and abandoned, whose wretchedness and torments, no doubt necessary, appeared to grow more and not less; but she gave him the stability of a healthy hearth, which was indispensable for the completion of his work. Indeed, not long after Mme Bloy gave to the ostracised author the gift of a home, which he had never possessed since the Périgieux days of his youth, he produced a book considered by himself to be the finest of all his works. And it is true that though small in compass, anyone conversant with his works will agree that Le Salut par les Juifs contains the concentrated essence of all his thought.

Fortunate, indeed, was this remarkable man in finding a companion in life who so wholeheartedly comforted and supported him throughout all the vicissitudes of his sorrowful life. The depth of his need is well expressed in two letters to his sweetheart during the time of his romantic courtship:

"The shadows are not altogether dissipated, and I am far from ceasing to suffer. But I feel sure that I am going towards the light, and it is because of you; by you alone, my dear heart has God willed that this miracle of resurrection should be accomplished in me. And now, is it possible to think that this prodigy of love should remain unfulfilled? Hope has re-awakened in me, the hope of days gone by, and I have re-found the spirit of prayer and shall resume the holy practices I abandoned long ago. I believe I can already glimpse the light that I thought was lost for ever. But at the same time it is certain that you are indispensable to me; that I would be nothing without you. It is absolutely necessary for me to have a companion every day and every hour, and you alone, among

all creatures, can be that companion. The difficulties seem to be infinite, but what does that matter if it is, as it seems to be, God's will that we should be married?"(1)

"Ah, my gentle friend, my sweet guardian, my beloved liberator who has restored me to my God and your God, so that we can form for Him one combined heart, burning with love - I feel that you are so profoundly in me!..You have done for me what the Compassionate Samaritan did for the traveller massacred on the road from Jerusalem to Jericho. May blessings and joys be showered upon you."(2)

Now, however good a Christian might be, there are precious few who would even have thought of offering marriage to a woman in circumstances so hopelessly wretched and unpromising as those in which Léon Bloy found himself in 1890. For example, in March of that year, in a letter to the Belgian student Henry Carton de Wiart,

he writes: "I am living in a constant paroxysm of suffering. All that I am able to get, through force or intelligence, is applied solely to the quest of the two or three francs necessary each day for my child and its mother. (See earlier in this chapter). Only this existence is crushing me, annihilating me."(3)

These words were penned by a middle-aged man with no unblemished record as far as the weaker sex was concerned, who was busy courting the lady from Denmark and writing her the passionate letters which were published by Jeanne herself after her husband's death.

Obviously he had not the slightest security to proffer. From a worldly point of view he was on the borders of destitution. It is true that Kagawa took his newly married wife into a squalid little hovel in the dismal slums of Kobe, and it might be said that he had as little to offer Mme Kagawa as Léon Bloy had to offer Mme Bloy. But Kagawa never had to endure the social ostracism suffered by Bloy. The Japanese Christian had a native optimism and human progressiveness to bring to his partner in life which were totally absent from the

(1) Letters to his Fiancée p.31

(2) Ibid p.35

(3) Léon Bloy: (Essai de biographie) Vol.11. p.340.

Frenchman's entire disposition. There can be no doubt that Bloy's marriage was a glorious leap in the dark taken with, (humanly speaking) a reckless faith in the Providence of God. Though that faith was put to the test every day in life, neither he nor his wife ever regretted the step. Everything that happened to Bloy, as he said over and over again, was 'adorable': and, truly, this was a marriage made in heaven.

No better picture of the home Mme Bloy helped to create can be given than that described by the two young Maritains, who ultimately became the god-children of the distinguished writer:

"They went through a little garden of olden times, then entered a humble home with walls adorned with books and beautiful pictures; they first came up against a tall pale person that seemed all goodness; her air of nobility was impressive. It was Madame Bloy. Her two daughters Véronique and Madeleine looked upon the visitors with their great surprised eyes. Léon Bloy seemed nearly shy; he spoke very little and in a low voice, trying to say to his two young visitors something important, something that would not disappoint them. What he was revealing to them is not capable of repetition in words: the tender love of Christian brotherhood, that kind of trembling from mercy and fear which seizes in the presence of another soul, a soul marked with the love of God. Bloy seemed to us the very opposite of other men - who hide their serious deficiencies in the things of the spirit as well as so many invisible crimes under the carefully maintained daubing of the social virtues. Instead of being a whitened sepulchre like the Pharisees of all times, he was a charred, blackened cathedral. The white part was inside, deep in the tabernacle.

From the fact of your having crossed the threshold of his house, all values became displaced, as by the shifting of an invisible ratchet. One knew, or one divined that there is but one sadness - not to be a saint. All else became twilight."(1)

Of a truth, the alchemy of divine grace is wondrous to contemplate, when we realise that God was able to take the love of a Léon Bloy in all its grossness and passionate indiscretion, and transform it into a love before which the young intellectuals of the Sorbonne bowed as

(1) Léon Bloy: Pilgrim of the Absolute (Introduction) pp.22;23.

before an altar of sacred purity. Kierkegaard's intellectual repudiation of human love, however heroic in its Stoic austerity, will never be able to break and to win the sinful heart of man. But the spiritual romance of Léon Bloy will ever give hope to the despairing and will fill the sorrowing, repentant soul of the consciously sinful with a glad surmise, that it, too, can rise above the faults and failings of its all-too human love and attain the unmerited sanctity of the peace of God which passeth all understanding. How often are we reminded of the story in the seventh chapter of St Luke's Gospel of 'the woman in the city which was a sinner', who disturbed the proprieties of respectable Simon's house by wiping the Master's feet after she had bathed them with her tears. At the scandal of intimately kissing those blessed feet and anointing them with the contents of the alabaster box, the consternation of the Pharisee knew no bounds. But such love was not to go unrewarded.

Simon's Guest said:

"Wherefore I say unto thee, Her sins, which are many are forgiven; for she loved much: but to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little."(1)

Poor, stumbling, adorable Bloy! "His sins, which are many are forgiven; for he loved much."

(1) Luke 8.47.

PART III.

BLOY'S MESSAGE FOR TODAY.

CHAPTER 1.

THE IRREVOCABLE.

We touch in this chapter upon one of the deepest and most ethically invigorating elements in Bloy's belief, which we have hinted at in previous chapters - The Irrevocable. This is the point at which he is closest to Baudelaire. Both these poetic spirits tasted of the same despair and were tormented by the same "presences". Indeed, when Bloy consciously embraces the life of suffering, it is second nature for him to turn to Baudelaire as to a "kindred spirit" and ask him to guide him into the hell of the modern world, to the very place where all hope must be abandoned.(1) Bloy, therefore, shares with Baudelaire in a kinship with all the unfortunate, the broken and the damned of this world. As he says in his reply to Father Athenasius before leaving La Trappe:

"An obedient son of the Church, I am none the less in a communion of impatience with all the mutinous, all the disillusioned, all those who have cried and have not been heard, all the damned of the world. When I remember this multitude, a hand grasps me by the hair and carries me off, beyond the relative demands of a social order into the absolute of a vision of injustice such as would bring tears to the pride of the world's philosophies." (2)

As was mentioned in previous pages Bloy was writing Révélateur du Globe when he was in the throes of his liaison with Véronique. Just as this partnership was nearing its tragic close in 1882, the prospective author was revising his book on Columbus. He was, therefore, at thirty-six years

(1) Cp Le Pal 1885 Article La Chanson de Lesbos
(2) Le Désespéré p.150 (Tr. Léon Bloy: Pilgrim of the Absolute p.93.

of age, living out the most harrowing phase of his bitter destiny and sounding the most dismal point of his soul's despair. It is possible for us, then, to get under le désespéré's skin and enter into his mood of abject despair as he pens the opening pages of his masterly work on the "Discoverer of the Globe":

"When the Devil seduces and gets on top of our freedom, he thereby acquires terrible offspring, both of our race and his race, immortal like their father and mother. This progeny generates and increases in its turn indefinitely, without any natural means being given to put a stop to this horrid, incalculable multiplication of the evidences of our shame.

It is the limitless empire of Satan. He reigns as patriarch over the multitude of the frightful children of human liberty. He adopts them as soon as they are born. His ministers, his officers, his chamberlains and his major-domos take care of them. This is an army against each of us, a huge army of invasion which attacks our souls every moment, at the hour of joy and of sadness, at the hour of sleep and of dreaming, even at the hour of prayer and of the most holy outpourings of the heart, but above all at the peremptory and troubling hour of death. This pitiless war with no truce, has as signal the decree of our will alone, a decree with no appeal, a promulgation that is irrevocable and sanctioned by infallible justice. God is able to pardon, and does indeed pardon: but the evil has been done none the less - and that for all eternity: and furthermore it does not cease throughout time to bring forth fearful fruits which the Devil places continually before our eyes to make us despair.

I repeat, that is where he derives his power, that is where he gets his portion, his inheritable property as Prince of Lies and the poisoned flower of the punishment he can extract. He circles the earth with his two huge arms as with a scarf of mourning and of death like the Mare tenebrosum (Sea of darkness) of Ancient Cosmography. Nothing escapes from his embrace, nothing except freedom crucified with Jesus Christ. Apart from this Calvary he is master of everything, and he can be labelled off with the name of all the influences that are ominous in life. He is between all lips and all blows; he is seated at every festival and there he surfeits us with horrors in the midst of our triumphs; he has slept in the darkest corners of the marriage-bed; he gnaws at and soils all kindly feelings, all hopes, all white purities and virginal sanctities and all glories! His favoured throne is the golden chalice of

blossoming love, and his sweetest bath is the purple hearth of flaming love. When we are not speaking to God or for God, it is to the Devil we are speaking, and he hears us... in a formidable silence. He poisons life's flowers, death's shadows, he digs precipices in the midst of our paths, he arms against us the whole of nature to such an extent that God has to entrust the care of each of us to a celestial spirit, otherwise we would perish from the first moment of our birth. In short, Satan is seated on top of the world, his feet are on the five continents of the earth, and nothing human takes place without him interfering, without him having interfered or without him intending to interfere. There is nothing to cause astonishment at this vast power, and Catholic good sense is not astonished at it. Satan has only what God gives him, and God gives him everything with the reservation of man's liberty." (1)

Readers of Le Désespéré will agree that even in its most sombre page there is no more terrifying picture of Satan's grip upon man and upon the world than that contained in the pages we have just quoted. It can be felt instinctively that we are dealing here with a man who not only is an expert at manipulating words in dramatic style, but who is endeavouring to communicate to us an awe-inspiring experience he has painfully lived through. Bloy has been through the fire and it has marked him. There is no mistaking the smell of the burning. What a shuddering impression seizes the heart as we read his terrifying sentence about the "huge army of invasion which attacks our souls...even at the hour of prayer, of the most holy outpourings of the heart." Commenting on this passage Marcel Moré says that the nearest approach to the sentiments Bloy is here expressing is that found in the 17th century mystic Père Surin's essay, Triomphe de l'Amour divin:

(1) Quoted in Résurrection; Léon Bloy pp.29-30.

"I cannot express to you what is going on within me... and how this spirit is united to mine without taking away the freedom or consciousness of my soul. An other self seems to manifest itself within me just as though I were a personality with two souls, of which one is bereft of the use of its organs and holds itself to one side, looking at the doings of the other who has taken over the possession of the body, while that other acts within the body as if it were mistress there. I feel that the spirit of God and the spirit of the Devil have my body and my soul as a battlefield, and that each of them creates his own impressions there. As far as the Devil is concerned there are spasms of anger and hatred against God which endue me with an impetuous desire to separate myself from Him forever; at the same time I experience a great sweetness, a profound peace, a celestial joy. From one side it seems that I suffer damnation, and that I am pierced with the needles of an eternal despair, but simultaneously I find myself full of confidence in the goodness of God." (1)

Very few contemporaries of Surin's could have given expression to sentiments like the above with the possible exception of Pascal.

It will be remembered that when Bloy was writing Révélateur du Globe he was coming to the end of that period in his life when, as he told his fiancée, he used to experience "celestial joys which the angels might have envied". He was finding, however, that these divine aspirations were not at all incompatible with the mood of "eternal despair" suggested by Satan. Such an experience is by no means unfamiliar to Christian saints, from the Apostle Paul onwards. More than one great evangelist who has been powerfully used of God in the salvation of souls, after a meeting singularly marked by spiritual potency, has had to guard himself against a time of "reaction" when the forces of evil molested his soul with more

(1) Quoted by Abbé Bremond Histoire littéraire du sentiment religieux Vol.V.p.253.

than usual pertinacity. A spiritually minded man is an obvious target for the arrows of the Evil One. Such a person is perpetually poised upon a precipice. There seems to be a divine logic breathing through this paradoxical situation. In the spiritual world nearness to God, or the spirit of Goodness, automatically brings us nearer to Satan or the spirit of Evil. It is because we know and appreciate in our own souls the blessing of the one that we fear and abhor and fight against the curse of the other.

The Zoroastrian struggle between the forces of light and the forces of darkness which was being continually waged in Bloy's heart led him to the conviction that the inexorable grip which God allows Satan to have upon the world is precisely this realm of the Irrevocable. As he cries in Révélateur de Globe, a sentence or two before the passage quoted above, "Satan's greatest power is exactly the Irrevocable".

Now, any reader of the works of Léon Bloy cannot but be impressed by a Calvinistic trend that runs right through his teaching. There is a suggestion of it even at the outset of his religious career when he wrote that wonderful letter to Dame Maria X.:

"...There is in the Christian life a terrifying matter which we must not dare to forget. It is that every moment of our life, each breath we inhale, each beating of our pulse: if I may so put it - each flash of our thinking - has eternal repercussions.

But alongside that there is another point quite capable of reassuring us, which is not less important to know and to ponder over - namely that every good deed has also got its eternal repercussions and we are reckoned in terms of infinity. The efficacy of the divine Blood is such

that a single true movement of Love, however imperceptible it may be, can, in the scales of Justice balance equitably several thousands of crimes." (1)

In Le Mendiant Ingrat we have two examples of this tendency which shows us that Bloy is closer to the logical implications of Augustinian ideology developed by Calvin than he was to the seer of Hippo, himself. On one occasion he had to pull up a correspondent sharply for having the audacity to use "by chance" (par hazard) in one of his letters. Replying to such an one he wrote: "The word chance does not exist in the dictionary of this writer and he is not going to stand for it". (2) He even goes further than this in Le Désespéré, when, referring to Marchenoir he says, "In his eyes the word Chance was an intolerable blasphemy which forever astonished him". (3)

Again, in Le Mendiant Ingrat, after having received a rather mournful letter from Henry de Groux with the information that he had arrived at Boulogne at the very time when people were recovering the bodies of several persons who had been found drowned, he replied:

"...It is incontestable, you know, that it was your arrival at A...(near Boulogne) which had foreordained this catastrophe. If you had not taken the journey - a supposition quite inadmissible, seeing that the destiny of each of us is irrevocable - it is quite evident that no one would possibly have been drowned.

For milliards of centuries the circumstances of this accident were linked together by chains a thousand times harder than bronze or diamond to the divine circumstance of your arrival in that place; and those former circumstances, just as much as the latter, were absolutely impossibly to foresee or escape.

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- (1) Léon Bloy: Essai de biographie p.90. (Vol. I.)
(2) Le Mendiant Ingrat Vol. I. p.209.
(3) Le Désespéré p.135.

Therefore, once more, allow me to congratulate you. The man around whom nothing but catastrophes are let loose is one of the elect. Cursed be the one whose presence only displaces the atoms!" (1)

Then, later on, when age is creeping on him Bloy writes in one of his letters to the Abbé Cornuau, who had sent him two hundred francs in the old man's extremity:

"...You speak to me of miracles at the feet of Mary and you think that our meeting is one of these: that is possible. Fundamentally, my dear friend, there are no miracles: There is the divine plan which develops quite simply. Two men have met one another, who ought not, who could not meet each other. So it seemed. In reality, however, it was necessary that they should meet - nothing could prevent it. Otherwise the balance of the whole world would have been disturbed. From all eternity it was ordained that on the 30th of June, last, we should have met one another." (2)

Calvinistic predetermination could not have been carried to further extremes. Nevertheless, Bloy would have indignantly repudiated the idea of any fatalism in his doctrine. "The word Fatalism", he says in Révélateur du Globe, "is only an obscure translation of this frightful attribute of the Prince of Evil spirits and the Emperor of craven slaves". (3)

His reconciliation of the predeterminate knowledge of God and man's liberty is suggestive and ingenious. To someone who was challenging him on this point he writes:

"You would like to understand how the foreknowledge of God can be reconciled with human liberty? Ah! That is quite a simple thing as far as I am concerned. It is as if you were to say to me that you do not understand how the idea of the number thirty can be reconciled with the idea of five multiplied by six - which I cannot understand any more, myself. I know without being able to understand that divine foreknowledge and human liberty have no need to be reconciled because they are exactly, essentially and substantially and absolutely the SAME THING." (4)

(1) Le Mendiant Ingrat Vol.11. pp.25-26.

(2) Le Vieux de la Montagne p.123.

(3) Résurrection: Léon Bloy p.32.

(4) Mon Journal Vol.11. p.78.

What Léon Bloy was up against was a dead and mechanical fatalism which certain schools of psychology seem to postulate. He would strongly have denied that we are the products of hereditary predispositions which drive us inevitably before them. A fatalism that induced passivity and resignation of behaviour was anathema to him. Indeed, the virile activism which characterises Bloy's works is one of their most stimulating attractions. The appalling thing for him was not that God knew beforehand all the sorrows and sufferings that were to be inflicted on His servant Job. It was the fact that God had, so to speak, leased to Satan a vast area of Job's life which the poor man could only defend with his frail sword of human liberty. "God gives Satan everything," he says, "with the reservation of man's liberty."

Emphasis must be laid on the truth that it was the moral implications of human freedom which engaged Bloy's deeply spiritual mind. Premeditated pains and tribulations were not nearly so fearful to be borne as the terrifying insight that the All-Seeing God knows already how the issue of the struggle with Satan is to go in any human heart and at any particular moment. To the sensitive religious mind such Omniscience tends to keep the soul in a state of perpetual spiritual awareness. It may be said that nothing is so calculated to keep a man morally and spiritually 'on his toes' as the burning consciousness that God has from all eternity foreknowledge of how this or that specific combat with the Enemy of mansoul is to develop.

The above extracts from the works of Bloy show us that his conception of the Irrevocable is of considerable complexity, containing a number of heterogenous elements which, taken together, make one awe-inspiring whole of existential anguish. First of all the Irrevocable is the past, in so far as the past is fixed and definite and can never be altered throughout eternity. What has been done cannot be undone. We are tied to the past 'as to a corpse'. Marchenoir is devastated with suffering at the thought that Véronique's body has been a prey to so many men. The repercussions of such unhallowed traffic must go on through the whole of eternity, and he cannot make up his mind to marry the prostitute.

Then, in La Femme Pauvre Clotilde cries out in bitterness:

"All the power of the gods can never bring it about that I have not belonged voluntarily to this man till death. The Facts are inexorable, they know nothing of pity, and even forgetfulness - were it attainable - is powerless to annihilate their overpowering testimony." (1)

In addition to the fact that the past is unalterably sealed for all time, the Irrevocable teaches us that the sinister power of the Evil One is continually on the watch to restrict and curtail our human liberty. Our mistakes are bound in chains across the generations in an inexorable concatenation. Even the death of a God has not been able to put an end to the historical consequences of original sin. In some religious circles Bloy has even created a scandal by referring to the "apparent failure of the Redemption." But what Bloy is trying

(1) La Femme Pauvre p.39

to express is that the Irrevocable is all that wastage of our liberty, all the persistent, devilish temptations pulling us towards death and the bottomless pit; - everything, in short, that fills the soul with that 'eternal despair' spoken of by Père Surin.

This woof woven by sin is brought out in Baudelaire's poem, L'Irréparable. Though different in form it contains essentially the same idea as that employed a quarter of a century later by the writer of Révélateur du Globe:

Peut-on illuminer un ciel bourbeux et noir?
Peut-on déchirer des ténèbres
Plus denses que la poix sans matin et sans soir,
Sans astres, sans éclairs funèbres?
Peut-on illuminer un ciel bourbeux et noir?

L'Irréparable ronge avec sa dent maudite
Notre ame, piteux monument,
Et souvent il attaque ainsi que le termite
Par en base le monument.
L'Irréparable ronge avec sa dent maudite. (1)

(Can a sky that is overcast and black be illumined?
Can a darkness that is denser than pitch
With neither morning nor evening nor stars
Nor melancholy lights be pierced?
Can a sky that is overcast and black be illumined?

With his cursed tooth the Irreparable gnaws
Our soul, a pitiable monument,
And often it attacks, too, like the termite
At the base of the monument.
The Irreparable gnaws with his cursed tooth.)

The actual word "Irrevocable" is not used at all in Fleurs du Mal. But "Irreparable" is used in this poem with much the same meaning. In another poem L'Irrémediable, Baudelaire also uses "Irrémediable", which to all intents and

(1) See Résurrection: Léon Bloy p.36

purposes is the equivalent of Bloy's "Irrevocable". Yet in 1877, the year when Bloy met Véronique, he had recourse to bring Paul Bourget to task for confusing the word "irreparable" with "irrevocable". So we have reason to believe that in spite of all his admiration for 'l'immense poete des Fleurs du Mal', he parted company with him on this particular point. No doubt, he would have argued, the Irrevocable existed, but everything was not lost. Bloy's whole endeavour is to teach us how the pact with Satan may be broken: how man, freeing himself from a past that is dead and fixed and leaping over the deed that is inexorable and side-tracking 'eternal despair', may plunge into the bottomless abyss which is God.

Then, in 1885, in one of the infrequent issues of Le Pal, which contained the article Le Chanson de Lesbos, Bloy points to the poet of L'Irremissible

"sticking on his face the mask of absolute perversity and looking at the reflection of himself, while he scares other folk into the bargain."

He couples his name with that of Barbey d'Aurevilly and addresses

"those two visionaries who cast their shadows in such a formidable way on the rampart of the supernatural and the Irrevocable, that one cannot help wondering why Dante required to take himself off from this world to show up the horrors of hell!"(1)

Thus even when Bloy had entered into his forties the notion of the Irrevocable is still linked in his mind with the name of

(1) See Résurrection Léon Bloy p.38.

Baudelaire.

Here, then, in this short passage from Le Pal (which only ran into four issues) mention is made of the significant phrase the 'rampart of the Irrevocable'. Now, in the face of that rampart there are one or two attitudes which can be adopted. One attitude was assumed by Dostoievsky in his Brothers Karamazov, where he says:

"And then we men of the underground shall sing from the depths of the earth a tragic hymn to God, the giver of joy."

This is the mood that whistles at the rampart to keep one's spirits up. Laugh at the wall: jeer at it: make a face at it: put out your tongue at it. All very fine, but thoroughly unrealistic, for the wall remains where it always has been. Baudelaire's behaviour in front of the wall is rather like that of Oscar Wilde's. Both of these artists, legally bound by Satan, remain in a state of passivity which gets to the point of being a morose and perverted delight in unholy things. Now and again a cry of fear or terror may escape their lips but, truth to tell, they are twins in the secret pleasure they appear to find in going down to hell "without horror, across a darkness that stinks." Finally there is the attitude that endeavours to break the wall down and use the débris to raise a new city, a world transfigured. In all likelihood this is what Bloy meant when he refused to identify the Irrevocable with the Irreparable.

Probably, however, it is in the conception of the personality of Evil that Baudelaire comes closest to Bloy. In his poems we

palpably sense the figure of the Prince of this world. Much truer to the psychology of human nature than Goethe's Mephistopheles, the 'demon' of Baudelaire has revitalised the Evil One, giving his satanic majesty that soul-disturbing quality which had been pitifully emaciated by the arid wind of a secularism which had been blown for centuries by the Renaissance over the plains of Europe. Not since the monstrous being of Dante's Inferno had Satan been depicted so awesomely alive. No longer the personification of an idea or sentiment, the poems of Baudelaire introduce us to a veritable spirit, a 'presence'. In this 'rehabilitation of the Devil', if we may so put it, Baudelaire found a worthy successor in Bloy. Neither of the two of them believed any more in the devils and spirits which peopled the atmosphere of Mediaeval times. But both these writers were aware that the empire of Satan was just as real and extensive to-day as it was six or seven centuries ago. Furthermore, they considered it their task to make the world conscious of this awe-inspiring truth. The poet of Fleurs du Mal speaks for all of us when he cries:

Sans cesse à mes côtés a'agite le demon,
Il nage autour de moi comme un air impalpable,
Je l'avale et le sens qui brûle mon poumon
Et l'emplit d'un désir éternel et coupable. (1)

(Ceaselessly on every hand the demon is busy,
He swims around me like an impalpable air:
I swallow him and the meaning burns my lungs
And fills it with a desire as guilty as it is eternal.)

What better paraphrase than this could we have of St Luke's great passage concerning the unclean spirit who returned to the house it had vacated and found it swept and garnished, bringing

(1) See Résurrection:Léon Bloy p. 42

with him seven spirits worse than himself?(1) Bloy puts the truth in other words in La Femme Pauvre when he speaks of "the silent cavalry of demons which each of us carries within himself."⁽²⁾ We are confronted here with an adversary infinitely more dangerous than the devil with the horns and cloven foot or with that other one at which Luther hurled his inkpot. The demon of the Irrevocable cannot be handled in that tangible fashion. And this was the demon which tormented Bloy during the years of which Le Désespéré gives the story. A quarter of a century earlier he had likewise ravaged the soul of Baudelaire, just as in Biblical times he had plagued the life of Job, with God's permission. Though the punishments inflicted on the damned of this earth differ in character, the torturer himself never varies.

Anyone reading Le Désespéré and Lettres à Véronique will agree that the punishment inflicted on Bloy was much more subtly excruciating than that meted out to Job. Marchenoir was torn by "carnal predispositions fit to make forty wills fall from the highest brink", (3) which gave him no peace "even in the hours of most holy outpourings." "Chaste as a monk," he groans, "he burned like a vine-shoot." (4) All through Le Désespéré we hear the fearful shouts of a Christian in sheer dread lest he is swept for ever into the whirlpool of the abyss. In Lettres à Véronique the sobs become more heart-breaking and agonising. The burning of the flesh after struggles of unearthly violence, inducing the wretched collapse of soul and body: then immediately after, the peremptory call to share

(1) Luke 11.24-26

(2) La Femme Pauvre p.99

(3) Le Désespéré p.308

(4) Ibid p.298

"celestial joys, which the angels well might envy." It might indeed be asked - which was the more atrocious to endure?

Some prim and proper Christians might wonder what was the moral justification of Bloy's position at all. Such a question, for Bloy, would have had no meaning. To try to regulate the world of the Irrevocable with a text-book of Ethics is as vain as attempting to illuminate the Albert Hall with the light of a single candle. Ethics, scandalised at the sight of Marchenoir, a Christian, cohabiting with Véronique, would end the business at once with a formal separation. But the Irrevocable is an abyss which cannot submit to the laws of Ethics. Placed as he was, Marchenoir would insist that any desertion of Véronique would amount to a betrayal and he would repudiate the very idea as an unholy and damnable suggestion. In his desperate situation he is still left with the terrible gift of his liberty of choice, - a precious gem of incalculable worth, the Devil is ready at every moment to snatch it from his grasp whenever vigilance in the slightest relaxes.

Le Désespéré brings out this nerve-racking situation to perfection when it describes the horror experienced by Bloy in the troubled hours of the night when he felt his will on the point of succumbing. Marchenoir resists the erotic appeal of Véronique for several days and then, his energy giving way, he is just about to yield.

"...Beaten down, tumbled about, lacerated, devoured - all at the same moment - his free-will weakening after so many days, gave out at last." (disparut enfin.) (1)

That "enfin" surging up, as it does, at the end of the sentence, bursts like a wave of satanic joy. It overcomes consciousness at

(1) Le Désespéré p.308

the moment when the will, at its last ditch, renounces freedom and falls to pieces before the wall of the Irrevocable.

There is, in truth, no comparison between the sufferings of Job and those of Bloy. They belong to two absolutely different dispensations. Bloy knows (only too well) that since the Death and Resurrection of Christ the victory of the Christian over Satan's dominion is assured: he must just wait with more or less patience and in unspeakable suffering until Jesus, who continues to suffer to the very end of the world, is un-nailed from the Cross. It appears sometimes that because of the certainty of that victory God, in the meantime, allows men as individuals, to be delivered to Satan and to suffer the horrifying experience of 'eternal despair'. Through such rigorous testing the Christian learns how to overcome. Then at last there opens before his eyes the extraordinary, far-reaching perspectives looking out on the abysmal depths of Love which are to lead to the final effulgence of Justice and Glory.

At least that is how the matter appealed to a convinced Christian like Léon Bloy - a man athirst for Justice and aflame with love for the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is interesting to compare another Catholic writer's handling of a similar situation of the Irrevocable in a novel of the present day, The Heart of the Matter. Graham Greene builds his story round Scobie, the colonial police official in West Africa. Though the hero runs his life in an outwardly secular setting, there is no doubt that "at the heart of the matter" the irrevocability of his tangled situation drives him to seek a solution by the light of his religious beliefs, dim

and fitful though they be. Here are the main elements which go to create the policeman's dilemma: (1) His love for two women, with the acceptance of responsibility in both cases. (2) His unwilling indebtedness to Yusef, a Syrian merchant and diamond-smuggler. (3) His unforeseen complicity in the murder of Ali, his native servant.

In the light of his glimmering religious intuitions, the only way out for the poor guardian of the law seems to be a self-inflicted death. It is singularly revealing to study Greene's deft handling of the subject in the realm of fiction, especially his descriptions of the contacts Scobie had with his paramour and his wife towards the climax of his personal tragedy, and compare them with the experiences related by Bloy in actual life. After revealing to Helen (his paramour) that he was to be made Commissioner of police after all (in spite of his former disappointments in this respect) he listens to the acid comments she makes on the information and then says:

"...I'll take you for a run in the car."

"That would be safer, wouldn't it?"

Scobie took her by the shoulders and said, "I'm not always thinking of safety."

"I thought you were."

Suddenly he felt his resistance give way and he shouted at her, "The sacrifice isn't all on your side."

With despair he could see from a distance the scene coming up on both of them like a tornado before the rains, that wheeling column of blackness which would soon cover the sky.

"Of course work must suffer," she said with childish sarcasm. "All these snatched half-hours."

"I've given up the future. I've damned myself."

"Don't be so melodramatic," she said. "I don't know what you are talking about. Anyway you've just told me about the future - the Commission^{ship}."

"I mean the real future - the future that goes on."

She said, "If there's one thing I hate it's your Catholicism. I suppose it comes of having a pious wife. It's so bogus. If you really believed you wouldn't be here."

"But I do believe and I am here." He said with bewilderment, "I can't explain it, but there it is. My eyes are open. I know what I am doing. When Father Rank came down to the rail carrying the sacrament..."

Helen exclaimed with scorn and impatience, "You've told me all that before. You are trying to impress me. You don't believe in Hell any more than I do."

He took her wrists and held them furiously. He said, "You can't get out of it that way. I believe, I tell you. I believe that I'm damned for all eternity - unless a miracle happens. I know what I'm saying. What I've done is far worse than murder - that's an act, a blow, a stab, a shot: it's over and done, but I'm carrying my corruption round with me. It's the coating of my stomach. I can never avoid it."

He threw her wrists aside like seeds towards the stony floor.

"Never pretend I haven't shown my love."

"Love for your wife, you mean. You were afraid she might find out."

Anger drained out of him. He said, "Love for you both. If it were just for her there'd be an easy way." He put his hands over his eyes, feeling hysteria beginning

to mount again. He said, "I can't bear to see suffering, and I cause it all the time: I want to get out, get out." (1)

And in the end, poor Scobie did "get out" by a cunningly-contrived overdose of Evipan tablets. In spite of the sternness of Catholic doctrine regarding the fate of the suicide, the unhappy man was willing to run the risk.

Such a thought would never have occurred to the deeply grounded Catholic, Léon Bloy. True, the thought of martyrdom was never very far away from his mind, and such a death he would have embraced as the highest honour that God could have conferred upon him. But dying for the Faith was an entirely different thing from a self-administered death. Not even in his blackest moments of despair would such a 'way out' of the Irrevocable have appealed to his sorely tried consciousness, which was not infrequently reduced to a situation just as apparently insoluble as that of the hero of The Heart of the Matter.

All the same there is a curious similarity between Scobie's kinship with the failures and the underdogs and Bloy's

"communion of impatience with all the mutinous, all the disillusioned, all those who have cried aloud and not been heard, all the damned of the world." (2)

It comes out strikingly after Scobie gives his wife, Louise his tacit consent to accompany her to Midnight Mass:

"He looked up at her with momentary hatred as she sat so cheerfully there, so smugly it seemed to him, arranging his further damnation. He was going to be Commissioner. She had what she wanted - her sort of success, everything was all

(1) The Heart of the Matter pp.250 -251

(2) Le Désespéré p.150

right with her now. He thought: it was the hysterical woman who felt the world laughing behind her back that I loved. I loved failure: I can't love success. And how successful she looks, sitting there: one of the saved, and he saw laid across that wide face like a news-screen the body of Ali under the black drums, the exhausted eyes of Helen, and all the faces of the lost, his companions in exile, the unrepentant thief, the soldier with the sponge. Thinking of what he had done and was going to do, he thought with love, even God is a failure."(1)

That last recorded thought of Scobie's is purely Bloyan in insight, but the reactions on the two men are totally different. Scobie takes it as an excuse for putting an end to his wretched existence, but the religious hope which underlies Bloy's despair, makes him struggle on, always finding a way out of even his most baffling dilemma. Time and time again he proved up to the hilt the scriptural promise:

"There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: But God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able: but will with the temptation also make a way of escape, that ye may be able to bear it."(2)

The reconciliation of Love with Justice had always been one of the burning issues engrossing the Biblically nurtured imagination of Léon Bloy, and our previous consideration of this subject has shown us that such a reconciliation can only be very imperfectly perceived in this world. We only "see through a glass darkly: we only know in part." But the avenue opened up for us by Bloy leads us to the mystery of that reconciliation. Unguessed at by reason, the Pilgrim in his journey towards the absolute Absolute can but kneel in profound awe before that mystery, bearing in his soul the

(1) The Heart of the Matter pp.275-276

(2) 1 Cor. 10.13.

"much suppressed, far away, very ghostly groaning of the Dove of the Paraclete which reverberates the terrible De Profundis." (1)

Such a spiritually health-giving mysticism, of course, was utterly removed from poor Scobie's compass of experiencing, and he could never hope to negotiate the troubled waters of the Irrevocable with the skill of a practised steersman like Bloy. The latter's companion in such voyaging is rather the great apostle:

"But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us. We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed: we are perplexed, but not in despair: persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed: always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal flesh." (2)

Baudelaire's attitude to the Irrevocable, as we have noticed, implied a resignation that was almost complete. Only a man reduced to passivity and with no 'fight' in him could allow himself to say (in speaking of Satan):

"Et le riche metal de notre volonté
Est tout vaporisé par ce savant chimiste."

(And the rich metal of our will
Is thoroughly vaporised by this knowing chemist.)

Marchenoir, on the other hand, though he sees his free-will disappearing "at last", could never endorse the sentiments of this couplet. Against such spineless resignation there is still something deep within his Christian soul which rebels. Having gone down to the darkest crypts of his conscience

"...his stupefaction and his horror are without bounds. Nothing holds any longer. The buttresses of his virtue come tumbling to pieces all over. The joints and supports of his will's iron-wrought timber, by which he had believed himself

(1) Le Salut par les Juifs p.11 (Not Tr. given in Appendix.)

(2) 11 Cor.4. 7-10.

able to defy all the weaknesses of nature, rotted and worm-eaten, fall literally to the very dust. Everything sounds hollow and ruinous...There is no possibility at all of preventing disaster and no means of fleeing." (1)

His carnal will, tormented and lacerated, gives way and in an agony of despair he gives his consent to evil. What a calamitous thing to do! - to give one's consent to something one knows to be evil. Ah, Paul! - you had a companion in your soul's distress when you cried:

"The good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do." (2)

Yet, with Paul, too, Bloy could assert:

"I delight in the law of God after the inward man." (3)

In contrast to Baudelaire, under the rubbish of his being, at the deepest part of himself he can still discover another will; that one infinitely more obscure, present all the time in the atrocious sufferings, in the very rupture of his free-will. It is the will which does not capitulate. This is the liberty crucified with Jesus Christ over which Satan has no control. In the desperate struggle he can cry with the great apostle:

"O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" (4)

like him, too, he can tremulously exult:

"I thank my God through Jesus Christ our Lord." (5)

Often this distressing will is reduced to nothing - just a poor flame on the point of dying out: yet in spite of appearances it is as strong as "forty wills from the highest brink".

- (1) Le Désespéré p.95
- (2) Romans 7:19
- (3) Romans 7:22
- (4) Romans 7:24
- (5) Romans 7:25

With difficulty, therefore, and not without the bruising marks of his Adversary upon him, Bloy discovered

"the liberty wherewith Christ had made him free".(1)

He realised that under his carnal will, annexed by Satan, he still had a germ of freedom left intact. Many a man makes no such discovery because he does not succeed in unfathoming his deepest self. Others, like the authors of Dorian Gray or L'Irrémédiable, do consent to see themselves as they truly are:

Tête-à-tête sombre et limpide
Qu'un coeur devenu son miroir!
Puits de vérité, clair et noir,
Ou tremble une étoile livide.

(Dark and limpid in closest harmony
Like a heart become its own mirror!
A well of truth, clear and black
Where a pale star is trembling.)

But many a time such a reflection brings no hope. It but paralyses the consciousness and reduces the mind to a defenceless posture before the Irrevocable. Self-discovery, indeed, is the beginning of salvation, but such an uncovering must be experienced as a "harrowing of the soul" and not at all as a secret delight. For a poor sinner who falls into the pit and struggles in the miry clay is not lost so long as his consciousness remains divided and he keeps within himself a suffering that protests.

A Baudelairian uncovering, though it cause a shivering of the intellect, may only serve to strengthen the triumph of evil. A Bloyan uncovering, contrariwise, is as sharp as a surgeon's knife and contains an agony that heals. The discovery of the will

(1) Galatians 5.1.

crucified with Christ, experienced in so tragic a manner by a Père Surin or a Léon Bloy is the beginning of a new life. Admittedly, the freedom of choice has been "thoroughly vaporised" by Satan, but under the rubbish of the moral collapse there stirs another liberty which has love for its object. Thanks to it the sinner, although enclosed in a "hermetical hell"(1) (hermetique enfer) can yet find strength to drag his shame and distress to the foot of the altar, and there, nourished with the sacred Body of his God, he can offer himself with a bruised heart, as an expiatory victim to Him who has submitted Himself for the salvation of the world - to the Irrevocable of the Cross.

Bloy's whole work is a living testimony that his despair was transfigured by the renovating power of the Sacrament. Ever since he was a young man of twenty-seven, as he tells Barbey d'Aurevilly in a letter, he had practised steadily the ritual of daily communion.(2) Only, with Bloy it was something more than ritual. It was the "daily bread" which the Paternoster teaches us to demand; and when physical necessity deprived Bloy of the sacramental meal, he had great difficulty, as he says, even to live at all. Probably the Catholic religion was the form of Christianity best adapted to suit the needs of his peculiar temperament. The very idea of Bloy being a Protestant just does not ring true somehow. With Baron von Hügel and Pascal it is different. Their message is not germane to the Faith in which they were reared. No doubt they were good Catholics (though suspect

(1) Le Désespéré p.66
(2) See L'Ame de Léon Bloy p.56

Yet they might have been Protestants. But Bloy's Catholic Faith fits his message like a glove. One is reminded of the first occasion on which he met his fiancée at the Coppées, related by Mme Bloy in her Introduction to Lettres à sa Fiancée:

"Before we parted I dared to hazard one remark: 'How is it that you, a superior sort of man, should be a Catholic?'

'It is because of that that I am', he answered."

From our knowledge of the man in his books, there is nothing to indicate that his answer was not perfectly correct.

Another lesson which Bloy learned as he went through the fires of the Irrevocable was that of true humility. To conquer temptation by the strength of one's own (presumably) unaided will is not infrequently the prelude to spiritual pride. One is inclined to forget what one owes to the grace of God. A fall, on the contrary, when it throws the sinner into despair, at the same time makes him realise his own frightful nakedness. He understands that of himself he is nothing, and that God and God alone can help him in his extremity. Even asceticism of the most rigorous kind can never punish a man with the sheer dismay inflicted by the Irrevocable. Self-inflicted or man-inflicted deprivation contains the element of the measurable and can therefore be borne with more or less tranquility. Not so the deprivation of the Irrevocable. To be up against a personal adversary whose whole aim is to crib, cabin and confine you, and in the end to force your consent to a malignant act which you would sooner die than commit, is to breathe the atmosphere

of a supernatural horror unknown to external asceticism. It is true that the wearing down of the will by drugs and psychological maltreatment - a method presumably adopted in certain notorious trials in central Europe of recent date - must be condemned as being diabolical in intention. But the wearing down of the will by Satan's repeated blows is a process ten times more excruciating to endure. For, to the sensitive mind no dope can deaden the agony. Rather is it at the point of most vivid awareness that the Devil shoots his decisive arrow.

Such, then, was the school in which Bloy learned his lesson of profound humility. The struggle he had with his will was Augustinian in its fierceness and intensity. And like his great precursor he was taught to depend with child-like faith on the Divine Hand alone. Yet this humility which the discipline of the Irrevocable enabled Bloy to achieve, did not prevent him from earning a notorious reputation as a hurler of curses. His fury and vehemence may be disconcerting to some of us who have dug our tent-pegs somewhat firmly into a visible and all-too-perishable earth. But when we realise that his "anger was the effervescence of his pity" we should know that ordinary canons of human conduct are not to be expected of a man whose native dimension was the Absolute.

Well may this age of modernity which has as its prophets men like Kierkegaard, Dostoievsky, Nietzsche, Heidegger and Sartre listen to the voice of Léon Bloy, and consider his modus operandi

in the face of a despair as devastating as any of theirs. Athwart the winds of despair he kept tacking his life's bark by the tiller of "simplicity". If ever anyone could have said with complete sincerity credo ut intelligam, it was this pilgrim of the Absolute. He believed implicitly like a little child and he attributed any insight into the things of God to this almost naive "spiritual childhood" which he carried with him to the grave. We recall the confession he made to his fiancée in one of his letters to her:

"Since you are to be my wife, since you are such already by my choice and by our irrevocable will, you must thoroughly understand me; you must know exactly what kind of man I am. A most grave and disastrous mistake would be for you to believe that I am a thinker, an intellectual, since such a conception would keep you from being completely united with me. I really know little, and I never have understood anything but that which God has made me understand when I made myself like unto a little child.

I am especially - never forget it - a worshipper, and I have always seen myself as being lower than the animals every time I have presumed to act otherwise than through love or the workings of love. God gave me imagination and memory. But my reason is very sluggish, more or less as might be the reason of an ox, and any analytic faculty, as philosophers understand it, I totally lack...

...Philosophy bores me, theology overwhelms me, words without love are meaningless to me; the reasoning of the wise seems to me a shadowy sewer, and the pride of the human mind makes me vomit." (1)

Simplicity of this character, combined with the deep-seated grasp of the metaphysical implications of the soul in its relation to the spiritual universe, makes Bloy a trusted guide in this modern world of doubt and perplexity. Too well is it known that not only individuals but peoples are held today in

(1) Letters to his Fiancée pp.47-48

Tr.fr. Léon Bloy: Pilgrim of the Absolute pp.30-31

the grip of an iron despair. Moreover, it is becoming increasingly clearer as we approach the End of Time that an apocalyptic eschatology, based as it is on a prophetic understanding of the Scriptures, can by no means be ruled out of account as the grande finale fulfilment of history.

Each day, therefore, it becomes more and more necessary for men, as individuals and as peoples, to pluck the rose of joy from the thorn of despair. The way of simplicity lived out and advocated by Léon Bloy is the golden key which unlocks both the gate of the Rampart of the Irrevocable and also that of man's metaphysical despair, the wall of which has been under construction since Blaise Pascal laid its first foundations more than three centuries ago.

CHAPTER 2

THE ABSOLUTE

We come to the point now when we shall try, as best we may, to fathom how Léon Bloy earned the name which has stuck to him like a leech and which he will bear long after he has become a legendary figure. All through, he has been known as the man of the Absolute. (L'homme de l'Absolu.) More than once this great writer has been likened to a cathedral: and no more fitting simile could have been chosen for a literateur of such impressive grandeur. His life and work, indissolubly constructed into one vital synthesis, may well be called the Cathedral of the Absolute. Every gesture, every spasm of violence, every prayer, every bark of uncompromising intransigence, every love-impelled indiscretion are but the varying aspects of the one majestic cathedral. Like the Bible, a cathedral is a most unequal and polymorphic structure. It has a place for the repulsive gargoyle and the bizarre image of the proud prelate eaten with worms, as well as for the sacred altar and the sublime stained-glass window. Not otherwise is it with the life and work of the believer, Léon Bloy. A cathedral is the mortal expression of the Absolute in the midst of time: and one will travel far before one strikes upon a phrase which so adequately and succinctly sums up the significance of the man and the thinker.

In this sinful world there have been at least two mortals who have been the obedient servants of the Absolute and who have had to pay the price of their obedience. If, after the manner of Bridie, we were to conjure up a scene in heaven above, it would not be

difficult for us to imagine Socrates' cup of hemlock balancing to perfection the whole bundle of Bloy's wretched existence of suffering and shameful ostracism in the minutely exact Scales of Justice. Both these men played a role in their day and generation, not for their own local theatre alone, but for the benefit of countless unborn generations who would crowd the spacious amphitheatre of the Communion of the Saints to learn the deep lesson of their life and teaching, so timeless in their significance.

Socrates was the humble servant of Absolute Goodness, which embraced the trinity of the Good, the True and the Beautiful. He spent his life like a gadfly disturbing the composure of his decent fellow-Athenians and trying to turn them away from the 'shadows' they were pursuing. But he fared no better than Bloy with his 'cochons'. Apparently mediocre people, whether they belong to Paris or Athens have got no great love for the reforming zeal which would drag them from their commonplace slum. A greater than either Socrates or Bloy said, "Men love darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil," (1) and all three of them came to grief on just that rock. The Cross is ever the cost of incarnating the Absolute in time. Socrates' whole mode of conduct, like Bloy's, was inspired by the Absolute. His meat and drink were of the poorest, and in summer and winter he wore the same coat. Though he went about shoeless and shirtless, it was not so much through the coercion of abject poverty, but because of his lofty conception of self-discipline. "A slave whose master made him live as you do,"

(1) John 3.19.

says a sophist in Xenophon's Memorabilia, "would run away." Still, by a surrender of the luxuries and comforts of life he secured for himself the necessary independence to go about his appointed business and follow the voice of his daimon.

Nevertheless, this kind of poverty is more akin to St Francis' than Bloy's. True, poverty and the practice of 'evangelical' poverty, were integral to the Vision of the Absolute. (The Poor Man who had not where to lay His head.) But Bloy's whole nature, to begin with, was so gross and unbalanced that Socratic self-discipline would have been hopeless. In his case, a long training of compulsory discipline in the school of dire wretchedness and want had to be undergone before that nature became cleansed and refined to carry out its prophetic mission. In other words it was only after the harrowing and chastening experiences of Le Désespéré that Bloy blossomed forth as the matured Pèlerin de l'Absolu.

From the life and works of these notable men, we may gather that Socrates, in a word used by James, was a 'once-born' soul, whereas Bloy belonged to the number of the 'twice-born'. The former stressed the discipline of a 'planned' education: the latter turned in disgust from all merely human teaching and built his faith on men turning from the fashion of this world to glimpse, along with himself, the Vision of the Absolute. The method and teaching of Socrates, conveyed to us substantially in the writings of his pupil Plato, will always have an influence on education. But, as we learn more of the intransigent ^{nature} of sin and the perversity of a world that has lost its way, the less confidence we have in the

method of education to heal the sore in man's ailing soul. If we were all demi-angels or "once-horn" mortals, education and ethical training might serve us very well. But the darkness that is blinding our eyes is not ignorance only (though it is that, too - and education will always be necessary) but evil desires. "Thou shalt not covet..." has always been the bug-bear of the Decalogue, and education is not going to solve that. H.G. Wells took a long time to prove this "nasty" truth. He spent a life-time turning out book after book in the vain hope that men would turn to the Wellsian utopia of scientific humanism, so rationally feasible, and thus achieve social redemption. Only after the second world-war did he lose confidence in his "faith" and he died a disappointed man. And maybe it is going to take more than two world-wars to teach us that men are not guided by reason alone, or even chiefly.

So, if we are wise, in these apocalyptic times, it will not be to the Socratic or Platonic Absolute that we shall turn, but to the Christian Absolute which is unfolded and propounded in the works of Bloy. In Plato's Republic, Socrates seems to be persuaded that the principles he is inculcating, though difficult of achievement, are by no means impract^{ic}able, and he sets out to give practical suggestions as to how best they might be introduced into the customs and institutions of the body politic.

Bloy, however, makes no such suggestions. The reform of a fallen world by education would be to him the work of an inspired maniac. At the same time his thirst for justice is every bit as keen as Socrates'. But, versed as he is in the Bible, which so completely

verifies his own experience of men and affairs, he has absolutely relinquished the task of rehabilitating a broken-down world. The world is transient and will pass away. Its days are numbered. Indeed, the entire bent of the Absolute he is serving so passionately, drives him into a furiously impatient waiting for that dread hour when God's clock will strike, ringing out the old order, and ringing in the new order wherein will dwell justice, truth and love.

No Columbus sought so passionately the realm of the New World as Bloy sought the realm of the Absolute. The whole mystical temperament of the Pilgrim is brought out in all its poignant beauty in the following passage from his diary, where he contrasts the quest for America with his own quest for the Absolute:

"The Spanish sailors who accompanied Christopher Columbus mutinied several times, going so far as to threaten him with death if he did not issue the order to turn back, long before they had reached the vicinity of San Salvador. Nothing less was needed for America to be discovered than the marvellous trust in God of this incomparable man, who said to the incredulous: 'Give me three more days and I will give you a world.'

But America was not the Absolute. It was a point of arrival where it would be possible to catch your breath, and from which in the end you would come back. The Absolute, on the contrary, is without return journeys. One does not come back from it because it is a journey without end.

The mystery is that the Absolute is not only an abyss opening on Eternity, but that it is at the same time the one and only point of departure, the starting place. One sets out from God to go to God, and this is the only shift in place which has any appreciable meaning, any usefulness. Everything else, that is, any journey in which one thinks one is going somewhere, is literally stupid, and the faster one goes, the more idiotic it is...

But once again, the Absolute is a journey without home-comings and that is why those who start on it have so few companions.

Think of it! always to want the same thing, always to go in the same direction, to walk night and day, without even once veering to right or to left, and - were it only for an instant - to conceive the whole of life, all thoughts, all feelings, all acts down to the least heartbeat, as the perpetual working out of an initial decree of the all-powerful Will.

Try to imagine a man of action, some sort of explorer, about to set forth on a journey. His powers of persuasion have aroused a few enthusiasts who have decided to follow him. The start of the journey is a triumph. A rain of flowers, wild applause, the delight of the crowds. In towns and villages flags are out, there are displays of lights, the bold travellers are feted. The very countryside revels over their passing through it.

Yet the joy soon dims. The wayfarers enter new lands which know nothing, understand nothing, and care less. Sometimes also our travellers arouse misgivings. Their passionate desire for the Yea or Nay of the Gospels, excluding all other forms of discourse, assuredly does not recommend them. Little by little the food and fine wines are replaced by potato peelings, and the contents of chamber pots succeed the flowers.

The enthusiasm of his companions is already wholly extinguished. Several of them have withdrawn on various pretexts and have not returned. The faithful few, in their turn, seek means to flee without too greatly disgracing themselves. They had not foreseen that there would be suffering.

Still, those who are left resign themselves from shame or from pride. As long as there continue to be human dwellings and men good or bad, a little effort still makes the journey bearable.

But now it happens that both the one and the other become sparse. We are entering into the desert, into solitude. Here are Cold, Darkness, Hunger, Thirst, vast Weariness, dreadful Sadness, the Agony, the Bloody Sweat...

The rash traveller looks for his companions. He understands, then, that it is God's good pleasure that he be alone amid torments, and he goes on into the black immensity, bearing his heart before him like a torch!" (1)

The time has come for us to enquire, now, regarding the intellectual scope of the Bloyan Absolute.

Rayner Heppenstall, from the point of view of the literary critic

(1) L'Invendable pp.22-25. Tr.fr. Léon Bloy: Pilgrim of the Absolute pp.57-59

is not always happy when dealing with the religious content of Bloy's work, but he is very near the point when he says:

"Bloy's total imaginative effort was to extend and interlock the two most perfect philosophical structures of the European mind, the horizontal Aristotelian classification of species or great chain of being, and the vertical Christian doctrine of the Communion of Saints, which insists that not only are living men brothers, but that the living, the dead, and the unborn constitute a single community, that the dead can 'pray' for the living and the living for the dead or the unborn." (1)

Bloy gives us a pretty clear statement of his doctrine of the Communion of Saints in the pages of Le Désespéré:

"Our freedom and the world's equilibrium are mutually dependent, and that is what we must understand if we are not to be astounded at the profound mystery, which is the philosophical name of the great dogma of the Communion of Saints. Every man who begets a free act projects his personality into the infinite. If he gives a poor man a penny grudgingly, that penny pierces the firmament and compromises thousands of hearts whom he does not know, who are mysteriously linked to him, and who need this man to be pure, as a traveller dying of thirst needs the Gospel's draught of water. A charitable act, an impulse of real pity sings for him the divine praises, from the time of Adam to the end of the ages; it cures the sick, consoles those in despair, calms storms, ransoms prisoners, converts the infidel and protects mankind.

The whole of Christian philosophy lies in the unutterable importance of the free act and the notion of an enveloping and indestructable mutual dependence. If God, in some eternal second of His power, willed to do what He has never done, annihilate even one man alone, it is altogether likely that creation would thereupon crumble into dirt." (2)

An attempt to understand Bloy's world of the Absolute is hardly possible without taking stock of his interpretation of history and the temporal process. The 'man of the Absolute' has no 'historic sense' in the accepted meaning of the phrase. When we speak of the 'historic sense' we regard history in terms of a continuous process through time. To have a 'historic sense' means that we have a sense of proportion and a fitting awareness of respective epochs of history as they occur as 'periods' in the temporal process.

(1) The Double Image p.23

(2) Le Désespéré pp.108-109 Tr.fr. Léon Bloy: Pilgrim of the Absolute pp.86-87

Such a 'historic sense' for Bloy is a result of the Fall and tends, as he shall presently be telling us, to alienate the creatures from their Creator. His teaching on the subject is diametrically opposed to our current understanding of history. As he tells us in one of his diaries:

"The fruit of a quarter of a century's reading convinces me that all the events of history are contemporaneous."(1)

And this conception is part and parcel of all his thinking about history. For example, when writing his book on Napoleon he says:

"History in its entirety becomes synoptic and simultaneous to the point that it is possible to take together and strictly connect with a glance, events which are most disparate or most distant. Duration is an illusion directly consequent upon the weakness of human nature in its fallen condition."(2)

So he is perfectly logical and in line with his fundamental postulate when he writes to an unknown correspondent, Marguerite:

"We must pray the Holy Spirit to deliver us from the illusion of time, of which we are all the victims. In suffering and in joy we believe that time is something, when it is really nothing at all, since it does not exist for God. It ought, therefore, not to exist for us. That is the thing which separates us from God. If we were to obtain this grace of not knowing what hour it is, we would already be in the blessedness of Eternity: and suffering, then, would be for us like a rapidly moving bark on the Paradisial stream."(3)

No doubt this synoptic view was to a large extent responsible for the quasi-Calvinistic attitude he adopted regarding Predestination, which we pithily sum up in Scotland by the phrase: "What's before ye winna ging by ye." Thus, in his book on Napoleon he says:

"We are moreover sufficiently admonished, if we are at all capable of any profundity, when we come to consider the palpable stupidity of any imaginary substitution to events which have run their course. Such and such an eventuality would have taken place, folk say, if such and such a circumstance could have been foreseen.

(1) L'Invendable p.259

(2) L'Ame de Napoléon p.86

(3) Bloy: Mystique de la Douleur p.168 (See also note at the end of the present chapter on p.249)

But that is just the point. That circumstance could not have been foreseen nor evaded, since that eventuality was necessary and not another. Facts are absolute in themselves in the very suddenness of their occurrence. Historical facts are the Style of the Word of God, and that Word can never be conditional. Vincennes had to happen, and so had Tilsitt and Bayonne: the Kings who were brothers had to be, as well as the incomprehensible impunity of Bernadotte and the disastrous campaign of Moscow. Thereafter Dresden and Kulm had to take their course, the immeasurable folly, too, of abandoning in the useless fortresses of Germany more than 150,000 soldiers, which were more than sufficient for breaking up the Coalition in the plains of Champagne. In the end, Grouchy had to come. All things that are known happened by necessity and many other things that are not known; and the unanswerable proof is that they have been brought under the eye of a God who does not make mistakes and has willed these things from all eternity."(1)

Such an uncompromising attitude to Predestination is not unknown in the land of John Knox, though it is certainly somewhat bewildering in theological circles which are animated by the less rigorous outlook of liberal humanism. In one of his admirable articles to the Manchester Guardian, Canon Peter Green (Artifex) poses the problem rather neatly. Dealing with the subject of "God's Providence",

he writes: "Clergymen were told during the war that when a young soldier died, they should tell the mother that God had not wished the boy to die, and was as sorry as she was. To me the idea that anything happens which God would have prevented but could not, appears plain heresy. I suppose the idea originated with Bishop Winnington Ingram, but it became very popular. But not with everyone. The Episcopal Church in Scotland closed a united mission in Glasgow with a public meeting in a large hall. Bishop Woollcombe was giving a rather crude statement of the idea I am criticising when a man in the gallery leapt to his feet and shouted: "I'll not listen to you. I'll not hear Almighty God hadden doon that wey. That stuff may do for London but not for Scotland." I have always regarded the Scottish as good theologians. Let me put the matter crudely. God, having given us free will, if A decides to shoot B, A alone is responsible for the evil wish. B will die, or be wounded and recover, or the pistol will misfire as God decides. Friendly critics call me a Calvinist! Very well. But what do those who hold the contrary view call themselves?"

Bishop Woollcombe may congratulate himself that it was only the

(1) L'Ame de Napoléon p.52

dour Scot who was up in the gallery. If it had been the fiery, volatile Bloy, he may not have got off so lightly.

Bloy's attitude to history is very markedly coloured by the analogical method of exegesis he adopted in his study of the Scriptures as well as by his mental Weltanschauung of Communion of Saints. The combination of these factors vis à vis his interpretation of history is clearly noticeable in the following statement:

"History is like a vast liturgical text in which the iotas and punctuation marks are worth as much as versicles or whole chapters, but the relative importance of each is not to be determined and is profoundly hidden. Therefore, if I think Napoleon may well be an iota shining with glory, I am obliged to remind myself, at the same time, that the battle of Friedland, for instance, may easily have been won by a little girl of three, or a hundred-year old tramp, asking God that His will be done both on earth and in heaven. So what is called Genius would simply be that divine Will made flesh; if I dare say so, become visible and tangible in a human instrument, brought to its highest degree of power and precision, but incapable, like a compass, of going beyond its ultimate circumference.

It remains for Napoleon, and for the infinite number of his inferiors, that we are all of us together figures of the Invisible, and that you cannot move a finger or slaughter two million men, without signifying something which will be made manifest only in the beatific Vision." (1)

Nevertheless, there is a curious similarity in ultimate conclusions between the fundamental convictions of the French writer and those of the Russian thinker Leo Tolstoy and the modern British historian Herbert Butterfield, though they have arrived at these conclusions by differing routes. In his most interesting Epilogue Part 11 of his chef d'oeuvre, War and Peace, Tolstoy discusses the problem of history in its relationship to human freedom and necessity. He sums up in 35 pages the theories that he had formerly illustrated in his great

(1) L'Ame de Napoléon p.16 (Tr. from Léon Bloy: Pilgrim of the Absolute. pp.318-319.

novel of 1,110 pages. The historical phenomenon he discusses is, of course, Napoleon. He shows quite clearly that the Corsican corporal (like another Austrian corporal of more recent date), though apparently free in all his actions and decisions, was in reality a slave to the 'gravitational pull' (as Butterfield would say) of history. His movements were determined by circumstances over which he had no control. Far from determining the course of history, it was the course of history that determined him. In his broadcast studies on history in the spring of 1949 (which were afterwards published in book form), Professor Butterfield has practically crossed the t's and dotted the i's of Tolstoy's contention, taking as his example the rise and fall of Hitler. Such a dominating example which has been before the eyes of the contemporary world for a couple of decades, could not but command the assent of all thinking people. The popularity of Butterfield's analysis of history is largely due to the fact that he is expressing in understandable language the deep, inarticulate, half-formulated thoughts of the man-in-the-street, and especially of the Christian man-in-the-street. Tolstoy had done the same thing half-a-century ago. But the Cambridge professor and the Russian novelist were possessed of a 'historic sense' which Bloy had done his best to destroy. Yet, for all that, the latter would have endorsed all that Tolstoy says about Napoleon, as the following passage clearly demonstrates:

"Not knowing himself where a mysterious Will was carrying him, concerning which he never dreamt of questioning the exigencies, and only reserving for himself a responsibility as total as any mortal could assume, it seemed a simple matter for him to demand

the absolute disinterestedness of several millions of creatures which were overwhelmed with glory - there being no other thing to offer them. Yet, in his heart of hearts he knew very well that these were but the inferior instruments of some irresistible Force to whose impulsion he himself was submitting, which were going like him, and at the same pace, to the inevitable achievement of a Design entirely beyond the comprehension of his genius." (1)

This is what Tolstoy says when he is discussing the same problem:

"Only the expression of the will of the Deity, not depending on time, can relate to a whole series of events that have to take place during several years or centuries; and only the Deity, acting by His will alone, not affected by any cause, can determine the direction of the movement of humanity. Man acts in time and himself takes part in the event.

.....
When we say for instance that Napoleon commanded the army to go to fight, we sum up in one single expression a series of consecutive commands, depending one upon another. Napoleon could not command a campaign against Russia, and never did command it. He commanded one day, certain decrees and instructions to the army, the fleet, and the commissariat, and so on and so on - millions of separate commands, making up a whole series of commands, corresponding to a series of events leading the French soldiers to Russia.

Napoleon was giving commands all through his reign for an expedition to England. On no one of his undertakings did he waste so much time and so much effort, and yet not once during his reign was an attempt made to carry out his design. Yet he made an expedition against Russia, with which, according to his repeatedly expressed conviction, it was to his advantage to be in alliance; and this is due to the fact that his commands in the first case did not, and in the second case did, correspond with the course of events." (2)

In spite of the difference in outlook regarding 'historic sense', the whole problem of free-will and necessity, which Bloy grasped in one mighty comprehensive intuition, is worked out with clarity and precision in the Epilogue from which we are quoting in a manner that the French Catholic must have endorsed in spite of his distaste for

(1) L'Ame de Napoléon p.75
(2) War and Peace p.1127.

philosophic argument. Tolstoy's faculty of analytic thinking is there seen at its best. He very admirably shows that the question of human liberty and predetermination appears differently to the historian than to the theologian. There are certain laws which regulate human conduct, and those laws hold good and can be forecast beforehand in spite of the apparent freedom of the individual. It is only to himself that the individual is 'free'. To the historian who is viewing the whole sweep of a certain epoch of history, there is not much left for the individual to do except what he actually did.

Tolstoy rightly tells us:

"The question of free-will and necessity holds a position in history different from its place in other branches of knowledge; because in history, the question relates, not to the essential nature of the will of man, but to the representation of the manifestations of that will in the past and under certain conditions.

.....
The insoluble mystery of the union of the two antinomies of freedom and necessity does not exist for history as it does for theology, ethics and philosophy. History deals with the representation of the life of man, in which the union of those two antinomies is accomplished." (1)

Bloy, of course, could never have expressed himself with such philosophic acumen; and we must remember that if history for him was "like a vast liturgical text", then the very intensity of his dominating idea of Communion of Saints, regulated as it was by the principle of spiritual affinities and Reversibility (which discounted time altogether), must have confused him in keeping apart history and theology as separate mental disciplines. In this respect he did the same thing when he confused 'human' and 'divine' love. Very naturally, when we are confronted with a one-idea mind, it is easy

(1) War and Peace p.1135.

to understand that all normal functions of the head and of the heart, had to 'fit into' that all-encompassing Vision.

Even by the time Bloy wrote his first novel he had taught himself to read history through the spectacles of his Absolute. Far from considering history as a fruitful field for scientific research,

"He looked upon historical events as the divine hieroglyphics of a revelation through symbols, corroborating the other Revelation." (1)

"He had drawn the initial idea for this from those exegetical studies which were, in perhaps a unique fashion, the point of departure for his intellectual life, immediately following his conversion. Bolstered by St. Paul's sovereign affirmation that we have everything 'in riddles', this absolute spirit had come to the firm conclusion that the symbolism of Scripture led to a universal symbolism; he had succeeded in convincing himself that all human acts, of whatever nature, unite in the infinite syntax of a mysterious book no one had suspected, which could be dubbed the Gospel's Paralipomena. From this point of view - very different from that of Bossuet, for instance, who thought, in contempt of St. Paul, that everything was made clear - universal history appeared to him as a homogeneous text, very tightly bound and jointed together, vertebrated, reasoned out, but hermetically sealed, needing to be transcribed into a grammar possible of being grasped." (2)

It will be seen, therefore, that Bloy was not so much concerned with history as a chronicle of events. We have to approach the pages of history in the same way as we approach the sacred pages of Scripture, with the same reverence and the same awe. His intention, as Mme Maritain tells us in her Memoirs,

"is to lead us to the threshold of a divine and impenetrable mystery when we expect to find an illusory clear story." (3)

This is somewhat different from the tactics of Tolstoy and Butterfield. They prefer to take the facts of history and make them speak to us in such a way that their reverberating undertones suggest a dimension which takes us beyond the plane of the merely historical. Yet, in this way, too, we are brought to the threshold of mystery.

(1) Le Désespéré p.130

(2) Ibid pp.130-131. Tr.fr. Léon Bloy: Pilgrim of the Absolute pp.312-313

(3) Adventures in Grace p.246.

But, far from being an impenetrable mystery, obscuring historical reality, as is offered sometimes by Bloy, it is a mystery which irradiates events and personalities with a dim half-light, hauntingly suggestive of fuller light yet to come.

Perhaps the real trouble is that it is so difficult to accustom ourselves to the timelessness of the 'Everlasting Now' upon which Bloy is continually insisting. The other two writers on history possess that 'historic sense' which we lesser mortals seem to need if we are to 'get the hang' of the chronological unfolding of events. The following passage admirably illuminates our meaning. Here, the world of the Absolute, the denizens of which were, are and will be the Communion of Saints - all contemporaneous with the eternal 'Now', the dead, the living and the unborn - in which Bloy lived and moved and had his being, is very beautifully depicted in one of the last books he wrote, when, as Earl Gray said, "the lights went out all over Europe." The timelessness and the principle of Reversibility which governs it is clearly outlined, as well as the 'inclusive' character of the Communion of Saints:

"The Communion of Saints. What do those words mean for most Christians, who repeat them each day as an article of their faith? The least ignorant surely know that such is the theological designation of the Church, the mystical Body of Christ, of which all the faithful are visible members. That is the elementary statement of the matter.

But how many are there of those who, going beyond this postulate, are capable of thinking - with the Apostles - that only the devils are outside the Church, that no human being is excluded from the Redemption, and that even the blackest Pagans are virtually Catholics, inheritors of God and co-heirs of Christ?

If all men without exception were not potential saints, the ninth article of the Symbol would be meaningless. There would be no Communion of Saints. That Communion is the concert of all the souls ever since the creation of the world, and that concert works

with such marvellous precision that one cannot escape from it. The inconceivable exclusion of one single soul would endanger the eternal Harmony. The word 'reversibility' had to be invented to give some idea, whatever it may be worth of that enormous Mystery.

It had been said as a pleasantery that the celestial bodies located, as we know from astronomic computations, at frightful distances from each other, are, in reality, within the seraphic vision a compact mass of immense bodies as closely set as the grains in a block of granite. This apparent paradox is a truth if one applies it to the infinite world of souls. And we must add that each one of these souls knows not its nearest neighbour, just as the luminaries of the Milky Way know not the incomprehensible harmony of these colossal splendours.

But God knows His work and that's enough. It is sufficient for us to know that a sublime equilibrium is wished by Him, and that the importance of each of His rational creatures escapes completely the loving conjectures of the greatest saints. All we can dimly see, trembling and adoring, is the constant miracle of an infallible balance between human merits and demerits, so that the spiritually indigent are assisted by the opulent and the timid supplemented by the rash.(1) Now, all this goes on unbeknown to us, according to the marvellous unknown ordering of the affinity of souls.

Such and such a movement of Grace which saves me from grave peril can have been determined by this or that act of love done this morning or five hundred years ago by a man unknown whose soul corresponded mysteriously to mine, and who thus received his recompense.

As time does not exist for God, the inexplicable victory of the Marne may have been decided by the very humble prayer of a little girl who will not be born for another two centuries.

Inversely, it is allowable to each of us to cause catastrophes, ancient or modern, to the extent that other souls can re-echo our own. What people call free will is comparable to those common flowers whereof the wind carries off the downy seeds to distances sometimes enormous, and in all directions, to sow no one knows what mountains or what valleys. The revelation of these prodigies will be a spectacle of a minute that will last throughout eternity." (2)

Here are two excerpts from the diaries, which show us that this theory is no vague, nebulous phantom unrelated to practical thought and action, but Bloy's common and persistent outlook:

"What mysterious concordances! Huysmans has been laid to rest on the same day and at the same time probably as Joseph Polak, (3)

(1) See next chapter, where this theory is more fully investigated.

(2) Méditations d'un Solitaire Tr. fr. Léon Bloy: Pilgrim of the Absolute pp.334-335

(3) Polak was a notable champion of La Salette.

the humble priest of Moravia, who perhaps has paid in extremis for this twisted pillar of the contemporary Church, where our Lady of La Salette was flogged. He to whom God the Father would show what was to be accomplished in a single second throughout the whole universe, would be His only Son, the One Co-substantial with Himself who would judge the world. That is no isolated act, unsupported by and independent of our faith, and which is called the Communion of Saints." (1)

"Yesterday we started a neuvainis for a poor old Protestant woman, dead a long time ago, whom Jeanne had greatly loved. Here we have an opportunity once more, to wonder at the mystery of the Communion of Saints; for the person was an unhappy creature, buried in heresy, many years ago, and who was as distant from me, in appearance as might be a savage from Canada or the Land of Fire. Well! I go and pray for her as I would pray for a relative who had been very dear to me, and certainly with the same efficacy. And why so? Because there are relations in soul-kinship that are independent of any consanguinity. I have very often thought about that, and it is through this chink that I have had insight into the great vistas of eternal life." (2)

"The great vistas of eternal life!" How far removed they were from the vain illusions of this passing world. We can just imagine how warmly Bloy would have agreed with his brother of the Absolute when, in the seventh book of Plato's Republic, Socrates compares this world to a dim cave where men, seated in chains, have their backs to the entrance, while they behold the shadows cast upon a screen. All this feverish anxiety over 'shadows' was entirely beside the point.

"One sets out from God to go to God...and any journey in which one thinks one is going somewhere is literally stupid, and the faster one goes the more idiotic it is!" (3)

However, Bloy's own procedure in the (for him) palpable world of the Absolute, in which he dwelt and the expression of which he brought to a fine art, need not delay us at this point. We shall consider it in detail in the next chapter.

- (1) L'Invendable p.297
- (2) Mon Journal Vol.11. p.88
- (3) L'Invendable p.23

If we turn to consider, now, Bloy's attitude to the Bible, we must beware of confusing the absoluteness of his acceptance of Holy Writ as the inspired Word of God with that of the dogmatic literalism of say, the Plymouth Brother. In too many cases it must be confessed, the Plymouth Brethren are taken up with the letter that killeth without paying enough attention to the spirit which alone giveth life. The fertile imagination of Léon Bloy saved him from falling into any such pit. It is true that he had not the scientific scholar's appreciation of the relative merits of the Scriptures. In all probability he would not have admitted any such claim. Over and over again Bloy tells us that the Bible is the Word of God and that He cannot do anything else save always speak of Himself in it. No academic interest prompted him to master the sacred page. His approach was ever devotional and receptive. He went to the Bible as a hungry man goes to the larder, to feed his soul from the stores it supplied. The analogical method, into which he was initiated by Abbé Tardif de Moidrey in his late twenties, was like a pair of steps for him, through which he was able to reach the contents of the Bible-larder which otherwise would have been beyond his reach. A scrutiny of Le Salut par les Juifs will provide a fairly adequate example of the use to which Bloy put this method of handling Scripture.(1) Some people may consider it old-fashioned, unscientific and as out-of-date as verbal infallibility. Admittedly it is not the kind of guide that one would normally put into the hands of Sunday School teachers. Nevertheless, in Bloy's hands it was an instrument

(1) See Appendix at end of work. (Tr. of Le Salut par les Juifs.)

which brought to light elements of divine truth which might not otherwise have been discovered.

As to the Faith propounded by the Roman Catholic Church, Léon Bloy accepted it in its totality. For him it was no accommodating faith, no soothing belief of the 'bien pensant': rather was it an aggressive, incandescent faith, which he shook like a fire-brand in front of the scared faces of his contemporaries. This non-conformity with the 'world', especially the world of 'mediocrity' inhabited by the 'cochons', created between his generation and himself a fundamental antinomy of a most intransigent character. Hence, he never ceased to pour the vials of his wrath and disgust upon the public press, the unworthy wearers of the Cloth, and the merchants of the temple. Yet no one proved himself more dourly uncompromising when he felt obliged to defend an article of the Faith. Nor did anyone give proof of more humility before religion's sacred ceremonial or the official priesthood.

"Clericalism," he wrote in his reply to a correspondent in one of his diaries, "is a word that is vague and treacherous - a beastly word which I positively abhor.

If you mean by that Roman Catholicism, that is to say, the one and only religious structure that can be accepted...then here is my reply to the three questions clearly stated:

1. I am for an Absolute Theocracy, such as is affirmed in Boniface VII's Unam Sanctam

2. I think that the Church must hold in her hands the Two Swords, the Spiritual and the Temporal, that everything belongs to her, body and soul, and that apart from Her there can be no salvation, either for individuals or for societies.

3. Finally, I consider that it is outrageous for the human reason to call such elementary principles in question."(1)

Again, in L'Invendable he writes:

(1) Mon Journal Vol.1. p.57

"Everything is to be accepted: the Trinity, the Incarnation, Redemption, Transubstantiation, Infallibility, even. The Church makes affirmation and teaches. We listen to her, we believe her, we know what she is saying. As soon as she speaks of the Immaculate Conception, we no longer know what she says. We do not even wish to know any more of the matter and Babel begins all over again. What does it matter to the Devil if we don't give up the whole business, so long as he gains that?

The Immaculate Conception is the mystery of mysteries held in store for the End; it is the Song of Songs; it is the Passion; it is the Resurrection; it is the Ascension; it is Pentecost; it is the Ten Persecutions, the Ten Crusades; it is in a sense Napoleon, it is universal Judgment." (1)

In studying the mind of this Catholic a outrance, one cannot help asking the question, what would have been his reaction to the recently adopted dogma of the "Bodily Assumption of the Virgin into Heaven," which has been solemnly canonised by the Pope in the summer of 1950. Taking into consideration his almost fanatical zeal for the Virgin, whose champion he always took himself to be - especially Notre Dame de La Salette - there probably would have been no hesitation at all on Bloy's part in hailing with enthusiasm the new dogma, which has caused so much consternation in Protestant circles. It would not have been credo quia absurdum with him so much as the confirmation in the form of a 'belief' of something that was entirely in keeping with a long-cherished desire. No honour was high enough for the Lady of his deepest veneration. The only grumble he might have had would have been why was the Church so long in making up her mind on such an elementary matter.

All through his diaries Bloy indulges his flair for Biblical exegesis, which though never learnt in any of the schools, nevertheless yields significant insight into Truth which commends itself to the heart even more than to the head. The absolutist bent of his mentality is clearly seen in the following example to a correspondent, André R:

(1) L'Invendable p.74

"Your card dated July contains a question to which I must give a reply. 'Why', you ask, 'is Jesus called Man, and Son of Man, when others are spoken of as born of woman?'

Here is my reply. Jesus, being in a manner both infinitely exact and mysterious, is the New Adam, that is to say, the True Adam, and is the only one, in the absolute sense, to whom the name of man is fitting. Other people who are named Abraham, Moses, St John the Baptist, or even Hanoteaux have only a right to it through participation, through affiliation. If, now, Jesus is the one man, the one Adam, of what man or of what Adam can He be called the Son if not of Himself, by whom everything was made? The Verbum Caro factum est is a reiteration of Factus est Homo of Genesis, in the same way as Mary's Fiat mihi secundum verbum tuum corresponds identically with the Fiat lux which opens the narrative of the Creation; in the same way, too, as Elizabeth's Benedictus fructus ventris tui - a reference on God's part to the elect-race in chapter 38 of Deuteronomy.

These concordances might be multiplied indefinitely, for the Holy Spirit ever spoke of the same thing - as I have spent a life-time in writing; all words hold together in the one Word, all men in the one Man, all beings in the one Being; and the most overwhelming of all mysteries is that in the universal proclaimed in St Matthew, He who calls Himself the Son of Man will not be able to do anything else than to JUDGE HIMSELF in His infinite justice, in His infinite Mercy, in His infinite solitude Ut sint UNUM sicut et nos UNUM sumus.

When I read in the Gospel the two words Filius Hominis, I know without being able to understand, but I know absolutely, that I read at the same glance, in a terrifying summary, the 45 books of the Old Testament and the 27 of the New - all history, all knowledge, all mystery. I know at the same time that I am a clairvoyant in the darkest shadows and a blind man in the flashing beams of Light.

But to know that, my dear André, really to know it, is quite enough to be melted in ecstatic joy as a wax before a red-hot fire."(1)

Here again we view the same kind of synthetic insight which we came across in Unamuno's book, though of course not expressed in the same philosophic terminology.(2)

(1) Mon Journal Vol.1. pp.77-78

(2) See Part II, Chap. 2 p.70 of this work.

NOTE on p.256 Christus und die Zeit by Oscar Cullmann, Tr. by Floyd V. Filson (Christ and Time) is reckoned one of the most significant theological works that Europe has produced within the last decade. It propounds a conception of time not unlike that of Bloy's. The kernel of the book, too, is its thesis that for the Christian, time and history find their centre point in Christ.

CHAPTER 3

THE ECONOMY OF THE ABSOLUTE
(A) Spiritual Commerce.

Though an unusually deep intellectual content distinguishes the Bloyan Absolute, our last chapter will have made it perfectly clear that here we have no abstract philosophical Absolute, leisurely spun from a speculative mind brooding in front of a study fire. Bloy was more familiar with a fireless hearth and an empty stomach than most academic theorists. No vague emanation of the brain which he could afford to discuss dispassionately and disinterestedly with the intelligentsia, the Realm of the Absolute was his native home wherein he had his whole being, body, soul and spirit; and he toiled endlessly to keep that home going. In other words, this Absolute had its own internal economy, a sort of compensatory system of balances and counter-balances which had to be so arranged that a dynamic equilibrium could be achieved. For example he says in a letter to Frère Dacien in April 1914:

"In exchange for a sacrifice which is voluntary and spontaneous, instead of any terrestrial prosperity, I have received the power to act upon certain souls to the point of leading them to the life supernatural and of making them the souls of apostles. I can therefore suffer without too much bitterness, sometimes even with a feeling of profound joy.

By a special privilege I early understood that it is necessary to pay for those who cannot pay for themselves, which is all the mystery of Redemption: and that we cannot win souls except we suffer for them."(1)

Again, in his preface to Le Sang du Pauvre, he states:

"And yet - thinking in terms of the reversibility of sufferings - we recall, for example, that it is necessary for a small child to be tortured by hunger in an ice-cold room,

(1) Lettres a l'Abbé Cornuau et au Frère Dacien pp.131-132

so that a ravishing Christian lady might not be deprived of the luxury of a scrumptious meal in front of a cheerful fire."(1)

In the same manner he notes with approval the following statement which he attributes to Jeanne, his beloved wife:

"A Christian who does not want to suffer with Jesus is a bourgeois comfortably installed in his arm-chair witnessing, with a full stomach and a sickening dilettantism of sentimentality, the punishment of an innocent child who is dying for him." (2)

Somewhere else he remarks that a culprit condemned to some punishment by a judge, is probably paying for the misdeeds of the person who has imposed the sentence.

To become an actively beneficent participant in such an economy one must in the first instance be poor, and in the second instance one must suffer. Our study of the French writer up to the present will have taught us how exquisitely Bloy was equipped in these two particulars. This internal economy of the Realm of the Absolute must be perpetually before our minds if we are to understand Bloy's consistent attitude to Poverty, Suffering, Money - and what Money represents to man, namely Blood and Bread - the Jews, and that Prince of the Jews, Jesus Christ.

From what we have already said of the doctrine of the 'Communion of Saints', it will be seen that Bloy brings it into operation under this counterbalancing 'machinery'. As he says in one of his letters to Georges Landry, written at La Salette:

"There is a divine law of equilibrium called the Communion of the Saints, by virtue of which the merit or demerit of a soul, of one soul, is reversibly manoeuvrable over the whole world. This law makes us absolutely gods, and gives to human life proportions of greatness that are most ineffable. The vilest blackguard

(1) Le Sang du Pauvre pp.16-17.

(2) L'Invendable p.286

carries in the hollow of his hand millions of hearts and holds under his foot millions of serpents' heads. And that he will discover at the last day. A man who does not pray is perpetrating an inexpressible crime in every language, human or angelic. Furthermore, a silence issuing from human lips is of more fearful import than the silence of the stars."(1)

Now, the implication running right through Bloy's theocratic and Biblical Absolute was the solemn, disturbing fact that the world had been thrown out of gear by the Fall. Our last chapter makes it abundantly clear that this was no musty theological dogma to which the Catholic writer gave a passing assent, as in the case of so many nominal Christians. His varied works never allow us to forget that this is a burningly crucial issue which is implicating us all the time. Man's Fall has dragged Creation with him into the abyss of corruption. The restoration and the redemption of Creation to its original purity and wholeness(holiness) must therefore be the supreme responsible undertaking of the divine Master of the Absolute. Suffering, perpetual and boundless, willingly borne, is the awful cost of such restoration: and poverty and appalling privation are the current coinage of this suffering.(2)

It is, then, in this context that we must see the vital role played by money.(argent)

Bloy makes no bones about it. He opens Le Sang du Pauvre - that veritable text-book of the Economy of the Absolute with the following striking and paradoxical passage:

"The Blood of the Poor Man is money. Men have lived by it and died of it for centuries. It expressively sums up the whole of suffering. It is Glory: it is Power. It is Justice and Injustice. It is Torture and Bliss. It is execrable and

(1) Lettres de Jeunesse p.98

(2) See next chapter p.274 ff. of this work.

adorable, the flaring and flowing symbol of Christ the Saviour,
in quo omnia constant.

Revelation teaches us that God alone is poor and that His only Son is the only beggar. Solus tantummodo Christus est qui in omnium pauperum universitate mendicat, said Salvian. His Blood is that of the Poor Man by whom men are 'bought with a great price.' His precious blood, infinitely red and pure which can pay for everything!

It must perforce be represented by money then; money that one gives or lends or sells or earns or steals; money that kills and brings to life like the Word; money that one worships, the eucharistic money that one drinks and that one eats. Viaticum of vagrant curiosity and viaticum of death. All aspects of money are aspects of the Son of God sweating the Blood that takes everything upon itself." (Present author's italics.) (1)

These last lines indicate that the use to which we put money is the use to which we put the Blood of Christ, the Poor Man par excellence.

"It is intolerable to reason," asserts the author in the preface of this same book, "that a man should be born swollen with goods, while another is born at the bottom of a dung-hole. The Word of God came in a stable in the teeth of the world's hatred: the very children know that, and all the sophistries of the Devil cannot alter this mystery that the joy of the rich has as its substance the suffering of the poor. If a person cannot understand that, he is a fool for time and for eternity. A fool for eternity." (2)

That was all very well for Bloy. He lived in a world of coherent symbolism, which gilded and glorified the plain, mundane world of the man in the street. But it takes the ordinary Christian some time and not a little patience to become initiated into the world of the Bloyan Absolute. The effort, however, is supremely worth while, for such an initiation is like a searchlight which illumines both the desperate nature of man's fallen estate and the greatness of his salvation.

(1) Sang du Pauvre pp.23-24 (Tr. fr. Léon Bloy: A Study in Impatience p.95)

(2) Ibid p.18 (present writer's Tr.)

Taking money, then, as the symbol of the poor man's blood - i.e. the vital energy that flows through him, giving him health and strength and a sense of well-being, Bloy shows us in the different chapters of Le Sang du Pauvre the extent to which money is abused. This is precisely the extent to which the poor are bled and left by the roadside to die like the man who fell among thieves.

Hence Bloy's demonic anger against the rich man whom he designates as an

"intractable brute which you are forced to stop with a knife or a bullet in the stomach." (1)

But we must never confuse this species of wrath with the vitriolic ill-natured spleen of the prolerariat against the upper classes. This latter type of wrath is the outcome of covetous selfishness. But Bloy's vehemence is essentially religious in character and is more akin to the righteous indignation that blazes forth in the twenty-third chapter of St Matthew's Gospel. It was because the rich man was the very antithesis of all that Bloy stood for in a spiritual sense that he lashed out at him with 'supernatural' fury. The healthy circulation of money among all God's creatures was to him indicative of the healthy circulation of the Blood of the Poor, whereas the rich man was but a cancerous growth which prevented the normal development of the body politic.

(1) Le Sang du Pauvre p.18

That such a situation literally prevails in our world few of us will deny after we have read the harrowing chapters of Le Sang du Pauvre. One would require to go back to Dean Swift before one could discover such a master of grim irony and pungent satire. Nevertheless there is an integrity of purpose and a simple, almost naive honesty about the man that is not always found in the dean. Whether he is discussing the curse of prostitution in the chapter L'Embarquement pour Cythère, where he makes the patronising 'benefactor' say:

- "You are hungry my poor girl...Here's some bread: it's your very own: only you must gather it out of my ordure," (1)

Or the worldly priests in Les Prêtres Mondains, who are all out for the rich and have no time for their poorer brethren,

Or the sinful exploitation of the natives in Jésus-Christ aux Colonies and La Casette de Pandore,

Or the equally sinful exploitation of the downtrodden working masses by the awful 'Sweating System' in Le System de Sueur,

Or the 'murderous mockery' of the so-called 'Charity' entertainments in Le Festin,

Or the none-so-blind-as-those-who-will-not-see attitude of the landlords and proprietors who get their unscrupulous house-factors to starve their poor tenants under the protection of the law in Ceux qui veulent rien savoir,

Or the unconscious blindness of royalty and the aristocracy in Le Petit Roi,

Or the callous hypocrisy of the well-to-do and the

(1) Le Sang du Pauvre p.56.

millionaires who make themselves out to be

"lilies of Solomon, who toil not nor spin," (1)
in Les Amis de Job and Les Éternelles Ténèbres,
there is no mistaking the deep compassion and the transparent
sincerity of a man who is witnessing for the Truth by the very
truthfulness of a soul in which the weeds of falsity refuse to
take root. Though Léon Bloy never became a martyr in the
accepted sense of the word, he always was a Martyr in the
etymological sense - i.e. a Witness. Such a witnessing could not
fail to bring sorrows and sufferings upon his devoted head.
Keyserling's words keep ringing in the mind as the deep meaning
of Bloy's life and work penetrates the awakening heart:

"Whence comes the privileged rank assigned to suffering and
the bearing of pain? It comes from the fact that only what
gives pain, gives bad pain, takes possession of the whole man.
It is for this reason and in this respect that the acceptance
of suffering and consent to it, as taught by Christ, opens to
us the shortest road to the goal." (2)

We remember how Bloy tells us that

"he had overleapt with one bound all the intermediary stages
of the Faith and was swept to the conclusive concept of
immolation." (3)

"Christian suffering proper," continues Keyserling, "means
consent to suffering under the banner of truth and truthfulness,
this consent being the only road which leads to regeneration
and inward transformation." (4)

The truths for which Bloy was witnessing were unpalatable in
the extreme, and he paid the price by being condemned to martyrdom
for life. And, after all, there are weighty points in favour of

- (1) Le Sang du Pauvre p.83
- (2) From Suffering to Fulfilment p.144
- (3) Le Désespéré p.44
- (4) From Suffering to Fulfilment p.145.

a living martyr rather than a dead one. Surely the philosopher-count must have had a man of the calibre of Jeremiah or Léon Bloy in mind when he writes:

"The man who has never been slandered, never persecuted, never held up to ridicule represents assuredly no genuine force," (1) whereas

"as opposed to all that is empirical and objective, spiritual personality is indeed the stronger power which always wins the day." (2)

"The great man's struggle is not against the world, nor even with the world; for its conflicts do not affect him - nor does he seek to produce an effect by his work: (Bloy, we remember wrote for God alone) he wrestles only with the dark alien forces which dwell within him, till he become transparent to the radiance of spirit." (3)

Bloy perhaps touches his deepest point in the mystery of poverty by his exegesis of the parable of Dives and Lazarus in a chapter entitled Le Verre d'Eau of Le Sang du Pauvre. No doubt the rich man thought that the difference existing between himself and the beggar, with all its psychological and spiritual concomitants, including his own callousness, was due to a law which governed this world only. Never did he imagine that he was initiating on earth a condition of soul that was to be perpetuated to all eternity. It never dawned on him that what he did with his 'probationary time' was to determine his eternal destiny. As our specialist in the Symbolism of Poverty remarks:

"It might be thought that separation between this rich man and this poor man could not well be greater. But to both of them death comes and separates them in a very different way, as body from soul, and the great 'Chaos' intervenes, mysterious and unbridgeable abyss beyond any man's conceiving - Death itself for ever incomprehensible. The rich man, then, from the midst

(1) From Suffering to Fulfilment p.90

(2) Ibid p.94

(3) Ibid p.72.

of horrible torments inversely foreshadowed by the pleasures of his table, cries out to the beggar in his glory, not even daring to ask for as much cold water as is contained in the 'cup' of the Gospel, but only one drop of that water on the tip of the beggar's finger, to cool his tongue; and it is in Abraham's intercession that he counts to obtain it. He could not have fared worse. Abraham pleads the implacable gulf. It is your refusal that makes this gulf. Lazarus asked no more of you when you took delight in his tortures. Your inexorable consolation has become his, and there is nothing to be done." (1)

Here we have a profound comment on the Gospel-truth that the significance of our temporal existence is to allow souls the opportunity of accepting love. It is only by the acceptance of love (*ἀγάπη*) that we can escape from the great chaos of death (i.e. loveless existence or nothingness) and enter the beatific vision. Those who have made the great refusal can never have the chance again. Curiously enough there is a marked similarity between Bloy's exegetical comment on this parable and that of Dostoievsky in the Brothers Karamazov, though it is doubtful if the French writer had ever read the Russian novelist. He certainly had some acquaintance with Tolstoy. Perhaps, however, it is not so strange after all, for both these Christians who had sinned greatly knew and realised in their own experience that Charity is the one way of knowing God. Speaking through Father Zossima, Dostoievsky asks:

"What is hell? I define it as the suffering of no longer being able to love." Then he continues: "Once in infinite existence, immeasurable in time and space a spiritual creature was given, on his coming to earth, the power of saying 'I am, and I live.' Once, only once there was given him a moment of active living love and for that was earthly life given him, and with it times and seasons. And that happy creature rejected the priceless gift, prized it and loved it not, scorned it and remained callous. Such an one, having left the earth, sees Abraham's bosom and talks with Abraham as we are told in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, and beholds

(1) Le Sang du Pauvre pp.74-75 (Tr.fr. Léon Bloy: A Study in Impatience p.91

heaven and can go up to the Lord. But that is just his torment, to rise up to the Lord without ever having loved, to be brought close to those who have loved when he has despised their love. For he sees clearly and says to himself, 'Now I have understanding, and though I now thirst to love, there will be nothing great, no sacrifice in my love, for my earthly life is over, and Abraham will not come with a drop of living water (that is the gift of earthly active life) to cool the fiery thirst of spiritual love which burns in me now, though I despised it on earth; there is no more life for me and will be no more time! Even though I would gladly give away my life for others, it can never be, for that life has passed which can be sacrificed for love, and now there is a gulf fixed between that life and this existence! (1)

Here we have the Irrevocable carried to its sinister extreme; and from what we know of Bloy's thought, we are assured that he, along with his Russian affinity, would have underlined the last two lines.

It is, then, the pathetic 'longing of the poor' that creates the impassable gulf:

"The longing to have a bite of bread, to have a draught of the goodly wine that rejoices the heart, the longing for flowers, for the fresh air of the fields, for everything that God has created for man without distinction, the longing at least for a rest after the day's work when the Angelus sounds in the evening." (2)

All these things are in the power of the rich, but the hard, impersonal system of mechanised society has conditioned an unbridgeable chasm between the 'haves' and the 'have-nots'. Unfeeling selfishness, indeed, has created a system out of the sweat of the poor, le system de la sueur. This sweat is but the prolongation of the Bloody Sweat in the Agony of Gethsemane:

"The evangelist St Luke heard the Sweat of Jesus Christ as it were great drops of blood falling down upon the ground. This faint sound, incapable of waking the sleeping disciples, was heard by the most distant stars and was to have a strange effect upon their wanderings. What are we to think of the sound, fainter still and

(1) The Brothers Karamazov pp.334-335 (Vol.1.)

(2) Le Sang du Pauvre pp.65-66.

much less heeded, of the numberless feet of these poor little children going to the task of misery and suffering extracted from them by accursed scoundrels, yet without their knowing it and without our knowing it, going this way to their elder brother of the Garden of Agony, who calls them and waits to take them, in His bloodstained arms? Sinite pueros venire ad me. Talum est enim regnum Dei." (1)

"This Agony of His has to be continued for so many unfortunates, for such a number of defenceless beings, men women and especially children!" (2)

Bloy, during his sojourn in Denmark in 1899-1900 had a foretaste of the present 'welfare state' in a society which was making a valiant endeavour to even out the social evils that have just been mentioned. In spite of his intense desire for social righteousness, he was not impressed. He was witnessing a state of 'organised disorder', which simply crucified 'love to one's neighbour', the second great commandment. It was an agony to his sensitive nature to see how this crucifixion involved not only the man who craved for love, but also the man who had it in his power to confer love. The latter prided himself that he had done his 'duty', so far as charitable causes were concerned, by paying his regular subscription or by supporting 'Charity' entertainments. But it was all done so anonymously in a system of abstract book-keeping, which kept him who gives and him who takes at opposite poles from one another, with a great gulf fixed between them..The benefactor was insulated from the human spectacle of the 'longing of the poor', and thus escaped the pathos of feeling the pang of suffering - which he dreaded above all things. Even the poor devil who is supposed to get assistance is cheated of his due reward in the end. For the 'system' is a double-edged weapon and cuts both him who gives and him who

(1) Sang du Pauvre pp.178-179 (Tr. fr. Léon Bloy: A Study in Impatience p.104

(2) Ibid p.177 (tr. fr. Ibid p.105.)

receives. Genuine 'charity' - that personally-bestowed gift - is denied the down-and-out altogether. That compassionate interest which alone has the power of relieving his craving and to which he can make a personal response, is conspicuous by its absence in an age of executive committees dealing with 'cases'. How can he possibly find satisfaction for his 'longing'? Worse still, in this inhuman system, with everything the poor man 'receives', he has to give up an increasing part of his 'liberty'. If he does not watch himself he will find his life 'organised' from the cradle to the grave without a particle of personal freedom remaining. A long time has elapsed since another Catholic wrote an arresting treatise on The Servile State, which is a pretty fair forecast of the trend of political and economic events today.(1) But Bloy saw it all coming before that book was written. And Dostoievsky, too, possessed an uncanny power of prophetic insight into the social configurations and bureaucratic tendencies of the twentieth century.

We see then that the 'longing of the poor' and the failure of the human soul to respond to it, is the fatal spade which digs the grave of implacable frustration, both in this world and in the world to come. As Bloy puts it:

"The satirical spectacle of the longing of the poor is the unpardonable sin, since it is an attack against the supreme spark of a torch which ever burns and which (as Scripture so often pleads) must not be extinguished. To do so is to vitiate the refuge of the pitiable Lazarus whom Abraham hides in his bosom." (2)

(1) See The Servile State by Hilaire Belloc pub. in 1912.

(2) Sang du Pauvre p.69

Commenting on Bloy's exegesis of the parable, Béguin remarks:

" More than anything else the man in comfortable circumstances dreads having to love his neighbour and to love God in His creatures; he thrusts far from him the mystery of the existence of the poor; he refuses to face it because he is still aware that it is the mystery of life itself, the unique mystery of the Fall, of Redemption, of Penitence and Hope." (1)

One cannot help noticing here again, Bloy and Dostoievsky are walking side by side. Again the tragedy is the destruction of the symbol in its relationship to the concrete reality it represents. An abstract 'paper' system has crucified the warm life-blood of generous charity. So that Ivan Karamazov, the 'rebel' member of the intelligentsia sums up to perfection the outlook of contemporary society when he disparagingly observes:

"I have never understood how one can love one's neighbour. To my mind, one's neighbour is just the one person whom one cannot love: at any rate one can only love him at a distance... A man must be hidden for one to love him: as soon as he shows his face, love disappears... In my opinion the love of Christ for mankind is a sort of miracle impossible on earth. To be sure, He was God: but we are not gods... Beggars, particularly those with any fine feelings, should never show themselves, but should ask for alms through the advertisement columns of the newspapers. In theory one can still love one's neighbour: at close quarters it is impossible." (2)

Bloy's whole teaching then, is that the spiritual commerce, or the commerce of the Absolute, unlike the material commerce of a fallen world, which is controlled by the money of the banks and millionaires, is regulated by the wretchedness, the poverty, the suffering and destitution of those who have scarcely got any money at all. The poor, therefore, have been granted a coinage which, sub specie aeternitatis is much more precious than the millionaire's

(1) Léon Bloy: A Study in Impatience p.108

(2) The Brothers Karamazov pp.241-242 (Vol.1.)

gold. They pay richly out of the treasury of their manifold sufferings and the abundance of their poverty.

The trouble is not that the money of the rich cannot be conformed to the system of spiritual commerce, but that the prevailing canons operative in normal commerce and business in a fallen world are fundamentally antagonistic to spiritual commerce of any kind. Though it would be extending the scope of this work too far to do anything like justice to Bloy's two volumes in L'Exégèse des Lieux Communs, in which he examines the stock phrases of the general public, and shows how people are every day giving unthinking utterance to deep, significant truths without knowing their true meaning, we may snatch a moment to look at two of his exegetical comments on 'business' and 'money' that have a bearing on the questions we are discussing.

Dealing with Lieu Commun XVII (Quand on est dans la commerce.) he says:

"The man who sells is always a miraculous fellow, a wonder-worker who has power to give to God the Father what belongs to the Holy Ghost, that is to say, to get Love passed into Faith and Fire into Water - a question which can be understood only with difficulty.

Still, it is quite simple. Money, the means whereby this translation is effected is the Redeemer, or if you like, the image of the Redeemer. But there you are! The merchants, reduced by their very nature to a hermetical condition, play ducks and drakes with the Redeemer, with Redemption, with the Three Theological Virtues and the Three divine Persons, and in a general way, with everything that can be conceived by the human understanding.

How many times have I received advice 'to do a bit of business,' that is to say, to write like a swine in order to get myself rich - alas, what a hope!" (1)

(1) L'Exégèse des Lieux Communs (Vol.1.) p.45

In N. Berdyaev's Slavery and Freedom, when dealing with The Lure of the Bourgeois Spirit and Slavery to Property and Money, the author makes appreciative comment on L'Exégèse des Lieux Communs. See p.181.

Commenting again on Lieu Commun XLV (L'Argent ne fait pas le bonheur, mais...) he remarks:

"I have let it be seen more than once that this metal (i.e. money), significantly undervalued in our own times, is, in the Holy Book, a figure closely identified with the Suffering Word, who is the Second Person in the Divine Trinity, the Redeemer. To say that it does not bring good fortune is, therefore, for any Christian a bold statement verging on irreligion, and yet it is Christian people themselves who give it currency. I find confirmation for this in a certain cheapening of the grand style which would saddle God with the responsibility of the happy-go-lucky cheerfulness of imbeciles.

A pagan would say roundly, 'Money is the thing which brings happiness,' and he would be terrifyingly correct. But you, you mean little bourgeois and so-called Christian, on whom all the symbols of divine life are dying out like pearls on a leper, you who are perfectly convinced that a hundred-sous piece is so charmingly desirable, why do you lie about it? What can you possibly fear? Your lack of grasp for prophetic symbols can never be fathomed, and it is certainly not you who should have any fear of catching sight of the bleeding Face, when money crops up! (1)

Now as we endeavour to plumb the deep significance of the Absolute in which Bloy lived and breathed, we cannot help being impressed that the measure of our human tragedy in this sinful world is the measure of separation between the external symbol and the inner hidden meaning which it symbolises. The external setting of man's progress from birth to death, according to Bloy, is one vast parable. But the symbolism of that progress had been hopelessly wrecked. 'Progress', indeed, in the accepted sense, was nothing but direct retrogression in the Realm of the Absolute. And Bloy laboured with passionate zeal and with all the prophetic vision of a true poet to recreate that broken symbolism and charge it with significant meaning. How gloriously he wrought to regain that Lost Eden which, to him, was the birth-right of every human

(1) L'Exégèse des Lieux Communs (Vol.1.) p.94.

soul! Hello, his co-pilgrim in the mystical world was perhaps the first to transmit to his receptive mind the seminal thought that the Eternal God hides Himself behind the veil of the symbol. Such a thought fell on prepared soil and brought forth the inexhaustible harvest which is still waiting to be garnered by teams of research reapers. "Bloy's symbolism," as Fumet truly says, "is a consequence of the Mystery of the Incarnation." (1) The revealing of the one all-important Symbol opened his eyes to the vast underlying world of symbolism which he devoted his life to explore and elucidate.

This symbolism is confusing to the minds of people who merely go to church to hear the 'sanctifying' of public opinion and bourgeois sentiment. Even decent respectable Christians find it a bit bewildering. For the normal procedure for good Christian folks is to strive to achieve an 'amphibian' existence in two worlds, the seen and the unseen. A poor mortal, if he is also a Christian, considers himself fortunate if he can maintain a precarious balance between these two realms. If, however, we are to understand the whole majestic synoptical view-point of the French mystic, this manner of 'Christian' existence is not only dangerous and risky, it is false and even irreligious. For however much pagans and worldly-minded people draw a distinction between the 'sacred' and the 'secular', this distinction does not exist for Bloy. He lives in the One world of the Absolute, where the visible and the tangible are but the outward symbolic shell of the authentic home of the soul.

(1) Mission de Léon Bloy p.143

The visible and tangible, indeed, are but incidental, and divorced from their representational value they have no meaning - or even worse, a sinister and diabolic meaning. It is the inner meaning of the symbol which alone has a vital bearing upon the life of the soul: and the soul is all that matters to this denizen of the Absolute.

"Saints tell us," he writes, "that if you could see a soul in all its majesty and dignity, you would die on the spot. There is no mistake about that, otherwise the Dogma of Redemption by the blood and disgrace of a God incarnate would be absurd and inconceivable." (1)

Having lived in the spiritual companionship of this magnificent Witness for the Truth for three years, one is forced to admit that there is a logical consistency running right through the life and thought of the Pilgrim of the Absolute. In this respect he is an example to Christian people everywhere, whatever be their denominational allegiance. For, those of us who would like to believe ourselves Christians, speak and write and act in a 'secular' way without feeling in the least that we are doing anything out of keeping with our essential calling as followers of Christ. When we 'go to Church' or 'say our prayers' or 'sing hymns', or 'read religious literature' we ~~start~~ turn on, as it were, the 'sacred' tap. But we are not doing these things all the time. The 'sacred' tap is not kept running. It is screwed off for long intervals to give the 'secular' tap a chance to run. Such a practice is entirely alien to the mind of the Pilgrim. After all, he was a Pilgrim all the way, not simply from time to time. So, whatever

(1) L'Ame de Napoléon p.63 See also Part II, Chap. 3 pp.100-101 of this work.

he was doing, writing a letter or a novel or a short story or his diary, or courting his fiancée, or teaching his children, or making friends or arguing with his literary colleagues, or struggling with the sins of the flesh, or even agonising in the hell of a guilt-stricken conscience, the 'sacred' tap was kept running all the time. In other words, his home was the Christian Absolute wherein dwelt and acted perpetually the Three Persons of the Godhead, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, no matter what earthly circumstances were prevailing at the moment.

Surely such an attitude is the crying need for a day like this when at any moment atomic energy in the hands of soul-blinded men may shatter the outward symbolic fabric of this visible world and destroy for ever the mortal habitation of the human soul. If we would recreate the broken relationship of the symbol and its hidden meaning we must learn, however painfully, first of all to understand, and then to live and move and have our being in God's one world of the Absolute to which Bloy bore such splendid and unremitting testimony.

Coming back now to the 'spiritual commerce' of the Bloyan Absolute, Le Mendiant Ingrat put his preaching into practice with disconcerting thoroughness. He considered it fit and proper that any friend of his who happened to be rich should be willing to prove his friendship by giving him the money he needed (and which he often asked), in the same way as he, in his turn, the chronically and perennially poor man, was prepared to pay for the joys and good fortune of others who could not 'pay' for themselves, out of

the wealth of his sufferings. On one occasion he had the temerity to say that one of his dearest friends, Pierre Termier, who helped him a great deal from time to time, had been called Termier to indicate that he was responsible for Bloy's 'term', so far as his rent was concerned. On another occasion the Ungrateful Beggar acknowledged a gift of 200 francs in the following characteristic manner:

"...On behalf of our Lady of La Salette, of whom I am the most humble slave, I hasten to send you greetings, while very much regretting that you have not done more for the service of our Sovereign Lady." (1)

Then, writing "to someone who does not wish to be named", he says:

"You notice also that far from being afraid of divulging my wretchedness, I lose no opportunity of broadcasting it. I am proud of it as others are proud of their wealth, and for the same reason. I have worked all my life to be poor with the same energy as others have worked to be rich. In that sense I am a parvenu." (2)

But there was absolutely no hiatus between our author's religious experience and the commercial transactions of every-day life. And so we are not at all surprised when, in a letter to Raïssa Maritain, he says:

"Empti estis pretio magno, you have been bought at a great price. There you have the key of all that is in the Absolute. When we know that, when we see it and feel it, we are like gods and never cease from weeping. Your desire to see me less unhappy, dear Raïssa, is something that was in you, in your essential being, in that soul of yours which prolonged God a long time before the birth of Nahor, who was grandfather to Abraham. Strictly speaking, it is the desire for Redemption, accompanied by the presentiment or intuition of what That had cost Him who is to pay the price. That is Christianity and there is no other way of being a Christian. Kneel, then, at the foot of this fountain

(1) L'Invendable p.262

(2) Le Vieux de la Montagne p.258.

and pray for me in the following manner:

'O God, who hast bought me at great price, I ask Thee very humbly that I may be at one with this poor man who has suffered in Thy service, yea, one in faith hope and love. He is suffering, perhaps, mysteriously on my behalf. Save him and save me for the life eternal, which Thou hast promised to all those who are hungering after Thee.'"(1)

Carrying his doctrine to its furthest logical extreme, Bloy held that the infinite sufferings of the Poor Man who had not where to lay His head, the despised and rejected Man of Calvary, was the 'bottom dollar', so to speak, of the price that had to be paid for man's redemption.

"Reflect," he says to his fiancée, "that Christ suffered in His heart with all the knowledge of a God, and that in His heart were all human hearts with all their sorrows, from the time of Adam until the consummation of the ages... Do you know, my love, that what is hardest for the soul to suffer, I do not say for others but IN others. That was the most terrible of the Saviour's agonies. Underneath the appalling visible Passion of Christ, beyond that procession of tortures and ignominies, to form a vague idea of which in itself gives us so much trouble, there was His Compassion, which we shall need eternity to understand - a heart-rending compassion, absolutely beyond words, which quenched the sun and made the stars waver in their courses, which made Him sweat blood before His last agony, which made Him cry out His thirst and beg His Father for mercy during His agony." (2)

The centrality of Christ in all Bloy's teaching is very marked. As we have seen, He is the centre of human solidarity, in so far as He suffers for and in all men. And not only so: but His identification with the human race is so complete that every time a human being suffers, Christ suffers at the same time. He expresses this conviction in one of his sublime doctrinal letters to Henry de Groux, which he quotes in Le Mendiant Ingrat:

"Christ is at the centre of all things. He takes all things upon Himself. He bears all things, He suffers all things. It is

(1) L'Invendable p.112

(2) Letters to his Fiancée p.97 (Tr. fr. Léon Bloy: Pilgrim of the Absolute pp.288-289.

impossible to strike a human being without striking Him, to humiliate someone without humiliating Him, curse or kill anyone without cursing or killing Him, Himself. The lowest of contemptible fellows is forced to borrow the Face of Christ in order to receive a blow, from no matter what hand. Otherwise the buffet could never reach him and would remain hanging in interstellar space, through the ages of ages, until it should meet with the Face which forgives..." (1)

Isn't that as fine an exegesis as one could desire of Matthew 25, 40 "Inasmuch...?" But the comfortably well-off have no understanding of the profound meaning of Christ's sufferings:

"Those accursed individuals," says Bloy, content themselves by preferring to have nothing to do with it (Le Croix de Misère). They suppose it is not for them, banking on their precious money which IS indeed the Most Precious Blood of Christ, and packing off to their proper places the whole tribe of the poor, whom they have bled to death and made desperate." (2)

Earlier on in the letter to de Groux quoted above, Bloy says that Christ's identification with suffering goes even further than man. It includes all living creatures. He is suffering and dying

"for the whole of creation. Yet, as Paul says, poor Jesus only saves creation 'in hope'. His sacrifice is not consummated. He agrees with Pascal that the Man of Sorrows is always nailed to His Cross: that "He continues for nineteen centuries to suffer with those who suffer: and that His Redemption can only be accomplished by the arrival of the Third Person by whom all things must be restored." (3)

This was the reason why Bloy found it so difficult to enter into the 'joyful' spirit of Easter. Time and time again in his diaries we read how little pleasure Easter brought to this 'mystic of pain'. Thus in an entry for 14th April 1895, he writes:

"Easter Sunday. I am chilled to the very centre of my soul and am as near as possible to despair. Such is the effect on me of this great feast. I find Easter Sunday as a rule painful, sometimes terrifying. It is in vain to hide my distress, which takes

(1) Le Mendiant Ingrat (Vol.11.) P.100 (Tr.fr. Léon Bloy: Pilgrim of the Absolute p.283

(2) Le Sang du Pauvre p.41

(3) Le Mendiant Ingrat (Vol.11.) p.98.

approximately this form: I do not succeed in finding the joy of the Resurrection, because - so far as I am concerned - the Resurrection never comes. I always see Christ in His agony, Christ on the Cross, nor can I see Him in any other way." (1)

Hence, there was no resting on the finished work of Calvary with Bloy. Cut and dried sentimental ditties like

"'Tis done, the great Transaction's done:
I am my Lord's and He is mine," and

"Jesus paid it all - All to Him I owe:
Sin had left a crimson stain;
He washed it white as snow,"

were not found in his Hymn-book. No cheap ticket to Paradise for this honest tradesman of the Absolute who was careful to pay the uttermost farthing of the rigorous demands of the spiritual account which was his due. He tells his fiancée that though God is infinitely loving He is infinitely and scrupulously exact in His accountancy. Paul underlined his whole doctrine of Irrevocability when he said:

"Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." (2)

As long as Jesus was suffering on the Cross, he (Bloy) was going to suffer too, and, like Paul, "glory in his sufferings", till such time as He was released from His agony. For it was his conviction, as we have seen(3) that all true Christians, in contrast to les prêtres mondains and the well-to-do Catholics whom he castigates so savagely in Le Sang du Pauvre and in many of his diaries, can share Christ's sufferings as members of His Body, and thus be allowed to add their finite mite to the total purchase price.

(1) Le Mendiant Ingrat Vol.11. pp.144-145 (Tr. fr. Léon Bloy: Pilgrim of the Absolute p.42.

(2) Galations 6.7.

(3) See p.254 ff. of this work.

Referring to his masterly letter to his painter-friend, from which we have already quoted, Bloy writes:

"Christ said in the Gospel 'I am the Truth', and the truth, my dear Henry, is that we all must suffer, since He who calls Himself the Truth, He who thus states His Family name is precisely the Chief of the suffering and of the tortured. We must suffer even as He suffers, for others and in others, men or beasts, telling ourselves that God's words are not in vain, and that it is wholly certain that the humblest among the oppressed will, in the end, be avenged and, in the end, consoled, when will come the hour of the infallible retributions. We are on the rack only to avow Glory." (1) Present writer's italics.

Bloy, then, was much more at home in his daily attendance at Mass, when the whole mystery of the sufferings of Calvary was re-enacted before his eyes, than he was at the so-called 'victory' of Easter Sunday. His life was a perpetual vigil between Good Friday and an Easter Morning which never came. For him there would be no Easter Morning until Christ, who was still suffering on the accursed Tree, became unnailed from His Cross and the third dispensation of the Holy Ghost was inaugurated. Till that time came, he literally lived on the Bread of Life which was imparted to him in his regular morning Communion. The realisation that Bloy's life was a constant vigil between the Crucifixion and Easter (i.e. Resurrection) does more than anything else to explain his exasperation and his impatience. His entire life and work was a furious endeavour to shorten that painful interval. But there were supremely two obstacles which seemed to postpone indefinitely the longed-for conclusion of that interval. The

(1) Le Mendiant Ingrat Vol.11. p.99 (Tr. fr. Léon Bloy: Pilgrim of the Absolute pp.282-283)

first of these was the apathy and indifference of so many Christians, who refused to take upon themselves the burden of Christ's sufferings. Enough has been said in the course of this study of Bloy's 'righteous indignation' at his fellow-Catholics on that score, and nothing further need be repeated at this point. We shall therefore pay attention now to the second of these obstacles, namely, the Jews. But as this chapter is already on the long side, and as the problem of the Jews is the crucial issue in Bloy's Economy of the Absolute, we shall discuss it at some length in the next chapter, which in some senses will amount to a commentary on Le Salut par les Juifs.

CHAPTER 4. THE ECONOMY OF THE ABSOLUTE
(B) The Jews.

Underlying the poetic insight of Bloy, the mystic, there is a whole system of Christian philosophy. The fountain-head of that philosophy is to be found in Le Salut par les Juifs, though of course the ramifications of the theory are to be traced, more or less, in nearly all his books. Le Salut itself has been recognised by all students of Bloy as his most difficult work. The author, too, acknowledges in a letter dated 9th November 1907, that it is "less a book than the outline of a book." Writing to Raïssa Maritain in August 25th, 1905, he says:

"Le Salut represents in surprisingly small abridgement, years of work, of prayer and of suffering, out of all proportion - entirely out of proportion." (1)

The book, then, is no theological treatise in the academic sense, but a poem in prose, or as Albert Béguin says, a 'cri d'amour', where the attempt is made to give expression to recondite truths which are all but humanly inexpressable.

As the preface to the 1905 edition points out, Le Salut is really a profound amplification of St Paul's Philosophy of History, as it is contained in the eleventh chapter of Romans. Still, it is an amplification which makes use of symbols and similitudes that never darkened (or lightened) the great Apostle's mind. Let it be said, however, that after having translated Le Salut and re-read it twenty or thirty times, one becomes more and more convinced that Bloy's metaphysical grasp on spiritual reality has rarely, if ever, been

(1) We have been Friends together p.138

excelled. Such a tribute, on the part of a mere Protestant, may appear excessive, especially when one has only a brief chapter for showing, however stumblingly, the validity of this claim.

Probably the best way to tackle this immense task is to start with the idea that Bloy's inward experience is virtually a microcosm of the vast macrocosm of fallen humanity's struggle with sin. The essence of his mysticism is that, all unconsciously, (and yet one wonders!) he is interpreting (microcosmically) the pilgrimage of his own soul and (macrocosmically) the destiny of mankind, in the light of scriptural and historical exegeses: considering these two exegeses as the twin confirming keys which unlock the gates of the ONE authentic Revelation.

The natural meeting-point of Scripture and History is the Jews, God's chosen people. More than Bloy have found in the Jews the 'Clue to History', (1) and the enigma of the Wandering Jew and his persistent survival must be the perpetual conundrum of every self-respecting philosopher of history.

Bloy's springboard for his magnificent study of the Jews was his polemic against Drumont's fanatical Antisemitism. But this was only a pretext for getting right down to the heart of the problem. On 28th January 1896, he writes:

"In '92, in consequence of a widespread scandal engineered by M. Drumont, I wrote Le Salut par les Juifs from completely disinterested motives, although I was harassed by want. My sole purpose was to serve justice and glorify God, whose promises to Israel are in aeternis and cannot be eradicated. The book, conceived in the spirit of the oracles of the Scriptures, had to go to the heart of things or fail completely. Thus I was obliged

(1) See John Macmurray's The Clue to History and also N. Berdyaev's The Meaning of History esp. Chap. The Destiny of the Jews. Berdyaev takes appreciative notice of Le Salut par les Juifs on p.105.

to adopt the method recommended by St Thomas Aquinas which consists in exhausting all possible objectives before summing up. An excellent method of great philosophical fairness, but one which reacted adversely upon me with the very people whom I set out to honour, as, I think no Christian had done for nineteen centuries. They would not look beyond my premises, entirely failing to observe that the violence of those premises was calculated to give the utmost force to my conclusions.(1)

Poor Bloy! The Jews - even the best of them - were no more thick-skinned than any other frail mortals, and had neither the insight nor the patience to discover the meaning of this Valiant-Heart for the Truth. Certainly it would have taken a well-balanced Jew not a little composure to read through such

"a fiery furnace of analogies and symbols which prolong into the infinite the meaning of divine realities. For at times Bloy reduces the Jewish people to the lowest level of the most repugnant vermin, and at other times he exalts them to a likeness and representation of the Paraclete." (2)

The Chief Rabbi of Paris, Zadoch Kahn, in any case would have nothing to do with such paradoxical truck.(3) Yet all Bloy wanted to do was to help the Jews to see themselves without blinkers, as they truly were - to fulfil, as it were, Burns' plea:

"O wad some Po'er the Giftie gi'e us
Tae see oorselves as ithers see us."

But who could stand such a naked scrutiny, especially from an author with a scatological reputation like Bloy's? It was the writer's intention to lead the Jewish race, on the basis of such an understanding of themselves, to an appraisal of their true value as repositories of the irrevocable promises. This is plain to all, when, at the very time he was writing his book, he states:

(1) L'Invendable p.424 O.C. (From letter to the Chief Rabbi.)

(2) We have been Friends together p.122

(3) See also Le Mendiant Ingrat Vol.1. pp.187-188

"To express my contempt for the horrible traffickers in money, for the sordid, poisonous Sheenies who sicken the universe, but at the same time, to express my profound veneration for the Race from which Redemption came forth (Salus ex Judaeis), which, like Jesus Himself, visibly bears the sins of the world, which is right in awaiting ITS Messiah, and which has been preserved in the most complete ignominy only because it is invincibly the race of Israel, that is to say, of the Holy Ghost, whose exodus will be the triumph of the Degradation. What a subject! (1)

Against such unsavoury extravagance even so good a friend as Mme Maritain puts in a gentle rebuke, admitting that "there are in Le Salut par les Juifs some dark strokes which are truly blemishes." (2)

Nevertheless, the Jew holds the supreme place in Bloy's economy of the Absolute. As far as the whole gamut of human experience is concerned, from the extreme of spiritual exaltation to the opposite extreme of unspeakable baseness, the Jew may be called the representative man. If then the Jew, in all his glory and in all his shame can be saved, there is hope for the salvation of the rest of mankind. And to think that it was in the flesh of a Jew that God sent His Son to be the Saviour of the world!

For Bloy the whole mysterious secret of Salvation is summed up in the words of St John: "He came unto His own, and His own received Him not"; because the Jews, by rejecting their Messiah, have made possible the offering of that Messiah to the entire Gentile world. Endorsing Paul's sentiments in Romans, chapter eleven, he says:

"Meantime let me affirm with all the strength of my soul that a synthesis of the Jewish question is sheer absurdity, apart from assuming, in the first place, the so-called prejudice of regarding Jacob as essentially a branch broken off relegated to the most abject decrepitude - without any hope of compromise or going back, as long as his 'Messiah' does not descend upon the earth in a blaze of glory." (3)

- (1) Le Mendiant Ingrat vol.1. pp.61-62 (Tr, fr. Léon Bloy: A Study in Impatience p.112)
- (2) We have been Friends together p.125
- (3) Le Salut par les Juifs (Tr. in Appendix at end, p.15.)

"Thanks to their fall," says St Paul, "salvation came to the Gentiles. In the inscrutable designs of God, the blind obstinacy of the Jews in not recognising their Messiah, was necessary in order that the Christian Gospel might break through the 'iron curtain' of Judaism and become 'universalised' for all mankind. What a felix culpa!. Well might the Apostle cry out in the intoxication of his excitement:

"O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways past finding out!" (1)

To similar purpose Bloy writes in Le Vieux de la Montagne:

"The thought of the Church in every age has been that holiness is inherent in this exceptional, unique and imperishable people which is protected by God, preserved as the apple of His eye in the midst of the destruction of so many peoples, for the accomplishment of His ulterior designs. The very abjection of this race is a divine sign, the very manifest sign of the permanence of the Holy Spirit over men so despised, who are to appear in the glory of the Consoler at the end of time." (2)

Yet however drastic Bloy's comments were on the Jewish people in Le Salut, he never in any way imagined that he was really doing them an injury. He tells us that he was neither for not against the Jews. His sole interest was to get at the secret of the Jews' supra-historical destiny in the world. Well did he realise that if he slighted the Jews, he would be slighting his beloved Master. Thus in the letter quoted immediately above to the lady who had been carried away with Drumont's Antisemitism, he writes:

"Imagine that people about you spoke continually of your father and your mother with the greatest contempt, and treated them only with insults and with outrageous sarcasm. What would be your

(1) Romans 11.33

(2) Le Vieux de la Montagne p.305 Tr.fr. We have been Friends together p.129

feelings? Well, that is exactly what is happening to Our Lord Jesus Christ. We forget, or rather we do not wish to know, that Our Lord made man was a Jew, the Jew par excellence, the Lion of Judah; that His mother was a Jewess, the flower of the Jewish race; that all His ancestors were Jews, along with all the prophets; finally that our whole sacred liturgy is drawn from Jewish books. How then can we express the enormity of the outrage and the blasphemy involved in vilifying the Jewish race?

Formerly the Jews were detested, they were gladly massacred, but they were not scorned as a race. On the contrary, they were respected and feared, and the Church prayed for them, remembering that St Paul, speaking in the name of the Holy Spirit, promised them all things, and that they should one day become the lights of the world. Antisemitism, an altogether modern thing, is the most horrible blow which Our Lord has received in His Passion that continues for ever; it is the most bloody and the most unpardonable, because He receives it upon the face of His mother and from the hands of Christians." (1)

One can only imagine the feelings of this odd Judophile if he had lived through the liquidation of the Continental Jews in the fourth and fifth decades of our century!

In order, however, to grasp what may be termed the metaphysical implications of Salvation, we must get back to the symbolism which Bloy has evolved with all the ingenuousness of a William Blake. Last chapter, it will be remembered, drew attention to the belief held so strongly by Bloy that "the measure of our human tragedy in this sinful world is the measure of the separation between the external symbol and the inner, hidden meaning which it symbolises," (2) and we have already spent a considerable time in demonstrating our author's use of that symbolism in relation to his doctrine of poverty and money. Our purpose now is to show how in Le Salut par les Juifs the Jews, Jesus Christ, Salvation and Eschatology are all part and

(1) Le Vieux de la Montagne pp.303-304 (Tr.fr. We have been Friends together pp.129-130.

(2) Last chapter p.264.

parcel of this symbolic scheme. If we are successful in grasping this point, we may congratulate ourselves as having glimpsed the deep meaning of the Bloyan mythology.

Le Mendiant Ingrat tells us that it was a Jew, of all persons, who got the gist of what Bloy was after when he wrote Le Salut. For, in a letter to Bernard Lazare, after having read a review of his book, he says:

"You had the insight to see that the Poor Man was at the base of all my thought, the adored captive of my lonely tower...

The fact is, I have nothing else to say: Jews and Christians alike, the carnally-minded readers of a Book which is fearfully symbolic, have been living now for forty centuries, on the false idea of a God who is mighty and Omnipotent. I think, contrariwise, that He had to leave everything, to sell everything, in order to give alms to that Lord who possessed nothing, who can achieve nothing, who is feeble in all His members, who feels desperately ill, who scrapes through all the dung-heaps of the East and West, and who cries in anguish through all eternity, patiently awaiting the Carillon-peal of the Seventh Day." (1)

The significant correlation between the Jewish race, poverty and suffering is pertinently brought out in the letter above-quoted to the lady who was critical about the Jews. There it is said:

"In writing a book about the Poor (i.e. Le Sang du Pauvre) how could I fail to have spoken of the Jews? What people is so poor as the Jewish people? Oh, I know well enough, there are bankers and speculators! People refuse to believe anything else. Legend and tradition would have it that all Jews are usurers. And this legend is a lie. It concerns only the dregs of the Jewish world. Those who know this people and look at it without prejudice know that it has other aspects and that, bearing the misery of all the centuries, it suffers infinitely." (2)

In one of the later chapters of Le Sang du Pauvre, entitled L'Avoué du Saint Sepulcre, Bloy again broods on the mystery of Jewish suffering. He gives several quotations from a Jewish poet,

(1) Le Mendiant Ingrat Vol.1. p.IIO

(2) Le Vieux de la Montagne p.304 (Tr.fr. We have been Friends together pp.128-129

Morris Rosenfeld, (who indeed, is l'Avoué, the Attorney) including the following lines (given in translation) which refer to Jewish emigrants, huddled together with their wretched baggage on the quays at New York:

"In its proper place, among those bags - do you see them? -
You'll find the world's treasure - their Torah -.
How can you declare that such a nation is poor?
A people who wander through the night and among the tombs;
Who know how to pass through horror, fire and death
To save what is sacred and dear to them:
A people who know how to stand up to so many misfortunes:
Who know both how to suffer and give their blood;
Who fear nothing and nobody,
Who risk their lives for a few poor leaves:
A people who are constantly bathing in their own tears:
Whom everybody beats and jubilantly tortures:
Who wander for thousands of years in the wilderness
And still have not lost their courage?
If you are to pronounce the name of such a people
You had better wipe your lips. - On your knees before them,
Gentiles!"(1)

After making the quotation, Léon Bloy goes on:

"He who writes in this strain is, in the eyes of the world, little more than a worm." (Rosenfeld was a poverty-stricken Jew and expressed himself in the language of the wretchedly poor.) "But he is infinitely right, and God Himself could not speak any better. The Jews are the first-born of all people, and when all things are in their final place, their proudest masters will think themselves honoured to lick the Jewish wanderers' feet. For everything has been promised them, and in the meantime they do penance for the earth. The right of the first-born cannot be annulled by a punishment however rigorous, and God's word of honour is unchangeable, because 'His gifts and vocation are without repentance.' The man who said that was the greatest of Jewish converts, and the relentless Christians who propose to perpetuate the reprisals for the Crucifigatur ought to remember it. 'The crime,' likewise says St Paul, 'has been the salvation of the gentiles.' What extraordinary people is this, of whom God asks permission to save mankind, after having borrowed His flesh from it in order the better to suffer? Is one to say that His Passion would not have satisfied Him if it had not been inflicted by His well-beloved, and that any blood other than that He holds from Abraham would not be efficacious to wash away the sins of the world?"

(1) Le Sang du Pauvre p.200 (Present writer's Tr.)

...As soon as he began to sing, his place was at the right hand of the Tomb of Jesus Christ. Without knowing it, he carried on the imperishable Affirmations of the Apostle to the Gentiles, and, never having been a poet except for the poor, he found himself - in the most mysterious sense - the Attorney of the Holy Sepulchre, the king without crown or mantle of the poetry of those who weep: the sentinel lost before the Tomb of the God of the poor, whom his ancestors had blessedly immolated. Thus, through the sole power of the divine laws, his Judaism was outstripped, overcome from all sides by the feeling for a universal brotherhood with the poor and the suffering of all the world."(1)

Rosenfeld is the poet of the proletarians. "But the proletariat - like tears - belongs to all peoples and all times. Only Jewish tears are the heaviest. They have the weight of many centuries. Those of this poet have been shed generously on a great number of wretches who were not of his Race, and now here they are, those precious tears, in the scales of the Judge of human sorrows, who is no more respecter of peoples than He is of persons."(2)

Rosenfeld, therefore, was first of all the poet of Jewish poverty and Jewish suffering, but he learned in time that poverty and suffering have no national or racial qualification, and he was led on to brother the souls of all the sons of affliction. In this respect he truly merited Bloy's designation as the 'Attorney of the Holy Sepulchre' and of the Poor Man Who laid down His life for all.

The above quotations from Le Vieux de la Montagne and Le Sang du Pauvre throw light upon one of the two main roles performed by the Jews in the thesis presented by Bloy in Le Salut par les Juifs. As will be considered presently in this chapter, this ancient people not only postpone the Day of Salvation by their continual repudiation of their Messiah, Whom they cruelly allow to stay indefinitely upon His Cross, but, paradoxically enough, they themselves pay by far the greatest share of the world's redemption through their age-long sufferings and persecutions. For they are

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- (1) Le Sang du Pauvre pp.200-202 Tr.Fr.Léon Bloy: Pilgrim of the Absolute pp.263-264
 (2) Ibid. pp.207-208 Tr.Fr. Ibid pp.264-265

not only the crucifiers but are the crucified as well.

"They crucified their God, refusing to recognise Him, and for this crime they have been wanderers themselves, crucified for twenty centuries." (1)

"Bearing the misery of all the centuries, they suffer infinitely."
(See above)

The same sentiments are echoed in Le Salut:

"The history of the Jews dams the history of the human race in much the same way as a dyke dams a river - in order to raise the level.

Athwart the current they are adamant for all time, and all that can be done is to clear the pbstacle with as little commotion as may be, knowing there is no possible hope of sweeping them away.

For an expedient like that has been tried often enough in all conscience, but there is no going back on sixty generations of experience. Conquerors whom nothing daunted took over the job of wiping them out. Multitudes who could never get over the Affront levelled at the living God persistently dashed forward to be in at their kill. The Vine, as symbol of the Testament of Redemption, was pruned with tireless devotion from such noxious parasites. All the same, this people, scattered over a score of different peoples, under the merciless protection of several millions of Christian princes, accomplished, throughout the centuries, its iron destiny - a destiny which was summed up in simply refusing to die out, in preserving always and everywhere, in the squalls or in the cyclones, the handful of exquisite dirt(2) mentioned in the Holy Book, which it believed to be the divine Fire.

That stiff-necked and reprobate Race, which Moses found so obstinately disobedient, has worn out the fury of men as an anvil of stubborn metal wears out the last hammer. Chivalry's sword has been dented on it and the finely tempered blade of the Mussulman chief has been shattered, to say nothing of the cudgel of the mob.

It has, therefore, been amply proved that there is nothing to be done in the matter; and in view of what God is content to put up with, surely it is most fitting for religious souls to ask themselves candidly, without any presumption or foolish display of feeling - confronted as they are with the Inscrutable - whether some infinitely adorable mystery is not, after all, concealed underneath this species of unparalleled ignominy perpetrated on an

- (1) Le Vieux de la Montagne p.1602 O.C.
(2) 11 Maccabees Ch.1.

Orphan People, which, though condemned in all the assizes of Hope, will not perhaps, in the day appointed, lack the right of appeal." (1)

Thus we are back again, once more, to the central thought in all Bloy's witness, namely that suffering, cruel, unmitigated, appalling suffering is the bitter, but 'infinitely adorable' coinage which must pay for (redeem) a lost and sin-separated world - a world alienated from the life of God. As has been indicated, the Cross is the grand summing up (ἀνακεφαλαιώσις) (2) of such redemptive suffering. But in the inscrutable wisdom of God, the Jews, by their calling as the Chosen People and by the amazing rôle they play in the drama of Redemption, are required to pay the (relatively speaking) heaviest sum in the ultimate, long-delayed purchase of man's salvation.

Turning now to the complimentary rôle of the Hebrew denouement; we are shown that this ancient people occupy the key-position of Bloy's symbolic interpretation of Reality. The argument appears to be that Money represents a power which makes for the well-being (salvation) of the poor. It is "the flowing symbol of Christ the Saviour, in quo omnia constant." (3) So that the Jews, by repudiating their Messiah, were deliberately separating Money from the Poor Man: dissociating the symbol from what it represents.

"This is a most disturbing mystery. Jesus' death essentially does separate Money from the Poor, the symbol from the symbolised, in the same way as, in ordinary deceases, the body is separated from the soul.

The Church universal, born as it is of divine Blood, had the Poor Man for her portion, and the Jews, entrenched in the

- (1) Le Salut par les Juifs. Tr. in Appendix pp.16-17.
(2) See p.70 of this work.
(3) Le Sang du Pauvre p.23.

impregnable fortress of an obstinate despair, took charge of Money - that ghastly Silver scratched with their sacrilegious thorns and disgraced by their spittle. In much the same way they might have kept the corpse of a God which was subject to corruption, exposed and unburied so that the universe might be contaminated." (1)

The point here seems to be that the economy of the material world is run by money: and as we have seen from Le Sang de Pauvre &c., money can be the finest thing on God's earth, or it can be the vilest. It all depends on how it is used. The Fall broke the symbolic relationship of money from what it represented, separating it from the poor: and the crucifixion acted like a stroke of paralysis perpetuating the separation through time. For not only had the historic Jesus been crucified, but the Christ, in His identification with mankind (the Poor Man) continued to be crucified, in that the Jews and the rich persisted in withholding money from the poor. Accordingly, Money divorced from the Poor Man, became the idol of the Jews. As they had crucified their Messiah on that first Good Friday, so all down the ages the desire to exterminate Him obsessed them. Only it was this idol Money, the simulacrum of Reality, that they were crucifying. Yet, O mystery! This is their God-given task "in order to fulfil their destiny, and not wander about the world without a calling", "because it is the Jewish habit to exterminate what is divine." (2) Answering the question what can it possibly mean to crucify money, Bloy says:

"It is hoisting it upon the gallows like a thief, raising it aloft; putting it on high; taking it out of reach of the poor - though it is nothing but the poor's daily bread." (3)

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| (1) | <u>Le Salut par les Juifs</u> | Tr. in Appendix p.26 |
| (2) | <u>Ibid</u> | p.19 |
| (3) | <u>Ibid</u> | p.19 |

The most convincing commentary on the truth of this sentence from Le Salut are the pages of Le Sang du Pauvre. Nobody, after reading that book will be likely to forget how grievously money can be crucified. But Bloy is not so much taken up with the crucifixion of inanimate money, but with the appalling conviction that it is the Christ, Himself, who continues to bleed.

"Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me."

Prolonged pondering over Bloy's symbolism of money has convinced the present writer that this French Catholic has an infinitely deeper and more comprehensive grasp of the metaphysical meaning of money than can ever be gained from an expert knowledge of economics, commerce and finance. The latter type of knowledge is merely factual and superficial. It tells of all the various uses to which money can be put in this material world. Yet it is all but a knowledge of the "whatness" of money. The "why and wherefore" of money is never brought within the mental horizon. So that a man might have the encyclopoedic grasp of finance and commerce of a John Maynard Keynes and still be an ignoramus of the Bloyan conception of money. Unless a person is brought before the mystery of money there is no hope that he can even begin to look upon money as Bloy saw it. Perhaps it was Léon Bloy's long, bitter experience of the desperate need for money that gave him his profound religious outlook on this "filthy lucre" which could do so much good, but which, unfortunately, he had all too good reason for knowing, handsomely merited its ignominious

title. From a secular point of view, indeed, it is quite impossible to understand the meaning of money. Reading and rereading Bloy's symbolism opens up to the mind and heart the mysterious significance of man's Fall, the wonder of Redemption and the delayed glory of the Eschatological denouement. It does this, not by formulating a logically comprehensive series of syllogisms, but by initiating one into that atmosphere of religious awareness and receptivity in which it is not so much the mind grasping the Truth, as the Truth grasping the mind. In other words, we are in the world of Faith, where the symbol and the symbolised, so sadly sundered in the world of the secular, come together with infallible exactitude and glow with the self-authenticating glory of Divine Truth. The symbolism of Faith, to be sure, is like the music of the "pealing organ" which, in Milton's Il Penseroso sounded

"To the full-voiced quire below,
In service high and anthem clear,
As may with sweetness, through my ear,
Dissolve me into ecstasies
And bring all heaven before my eyes."

Such truth cannot exist in the secular world, for that is the world of the Fall. Salvation, then, is the bringing together of the symbol and the symbolised. Really to know the Word of God, the Symbol par excellence is the royal road for grasping the meaning of all correlative symbols of which Christ is the comprehensive Epitome.

If a personal word may be allowed in this study of Bloy's symbolism it would be to the effect that the present writer has benefited to an incalculable degree from endeavouring to see Money

through the eyes of Bloy. The path has been long and arduous, for the French author is no slick or easily understood expositor. But the journey has been infinitely worth-while. In these days of rising costs and inflation, a mental discipline of Bloyan symbolism undoubtedly brings composure of mind and peace of heart. When the symbol has been divorced from the inner reality it represents, one begins to understand that money is apt to play the most fantastic tricks in the secular world. As Béguin says:

"From the moment when Faith has been left behind, the symbol becomes impenetrable; in other words, it begins to exist in its own account and there is no possibility of passing through it to the reality to which it corresponds: then it is that the whole visible world ceases to show 'the footprint of the Invisible' and begins an autonomous existence - a life without life - instead of deriving the fulness of its being from the fulness of its meaning." (1)

The Jewish race, then, like perfidious Judas, who, losing the sense that unites Christ to His symbol, money, leaves the One for the other and makes the tragic exchange of the Saviour for the pieces of silver. Money, therefore, is worshipped in itself, and the comprehension of the mysterious and informing 'translation' of the Divine Word, is completely lost. Judas' sacrilegious act becomes renewed perpetually. The worship which is due to God alone is now deflected upon Money. The horrible meaning of the stock-phrase "eating money" becomes revealed as the celebration of a Satanic eucharist. For money, the blood of the poor, is identical with the Blood of Christ. By "eating money" therefore, the very substance of the poor is devoured and the orgy of a diabolical cannibalism is perpetrated.

(1) Léon Bloy: A Study in Impatience. p.97.

Péguy, the French poet who was killed in the early stages of the 1914-18 war, and who long after was "discovered" in France, comes nearest to Bloy in his metaphysical understanding of money. The 'black-magic' which it exercised on the vital flexibility of human life is pertinently brought out in his Note conjointe:

"Just as the Gospels contain the whole of Christian thought, so the savings-bank book is the book which contains the whole of modern thought. It alone is strong enough to stand up against the Gospels, for it is the book of money, which is Antichrist." (1)

Both Péguy and Bloy spring from the soil. Their peasant souls, victimised so harshly by the rigorous treatment of money (or the lack of it), indoctrinated them as nothing else could do to the deadly rôle played by money in the material economy of the world, and this explains the clear-sighted fury that devoured them both against its brutalising and debasing influence.

It is a most curious thing that these two kindred spirits only came into meaningful contact once, though Bloy spent the last years of his life at Bourg-la-Reine in a house that had belonged to the poet. Mme Maritain takes note of the incident in her Memoirs:

"Read first through curiosity, then with the liveliest interest, an issue of Charles Péguy's Cahiers de la Quinzaine. It deals with poverty. I could not refrain from writing to the author:

'Sir, You do not know me, and we are so far apart that I do not know how the slightest desire to know me can ever arise in you. Yet one of your friends had me read your study on Jean Coste, and I would become sick if I did not congratulate you. In our day of automobiles and of the utmost congenital idiocy, it is

(1) Léon Bloy: A Study in Impatience p.98.

dazzling to find tucked away in a pamphlet so methodical a demonstrator, so precise a dialectician, and, at the same time - O marvel of marvels - a soul so young, and so moving a talent! The passage "misery (misere) is a grandeur..." gave me the impression of a rejuvenescence of Pascal. There are others; page 23 for example, "a miserable man exists in his misery..." of which I believe no other contemporary writer would have been capable.

An old prisoner of misery, at sixty I have not yet succeeded in escaping from it; but clinging still to hope; I thank you for having taken the trouble, without knowing me, to write this remarkable passage for me." (1)

Commenting on this letter, Bloy continues:

"Péguy is right in wishing to describe the boundaries between misery and poverty, but he doesn't bring out the difference all the same. Here it is - misery is the lack of what is necessary, while Poverty is the lack of what is superfluous." (2)

One is impressed, too, by the close similarity of outlook between Péguy's understanding of the Jews and that of Bloy's. It would be interesting to compare the two of them on this point but time and space forbid.

Albert Béguin, in Léon Bloy l'Impatient sums up in masterly fashion the whole crux of Bloy's thesis vis à vis the Hebrew people. As it is extremely improbable that the present writer could improve such a statement, he gives the relevant paragraph in extenso:

"If the Jews had the misfortune to keep only the symbol emptied of its substance - Money without the Messiah, without the Poor Man whom it represents - and thus fell into idolatry of matter, Christendom has not got its due either. For though it may have kept the Poor Man, it is only too obvious from the actual treatment inflicted on the poor by Christians of modern times, that they, too, have fallen. Nothing will be re-established until the day when the symbol and what it stands for are reconciled and re-united: that means, on the one hand, that the reunion of the Synagogue and the Church, the receiving of the Synagogue into the Church, will be the only valid sign of the

(1) Quoted from L'Invendable p.1241 O.C. in We have been Friends together pp.168-169.

(2) L'Invendable p.1241 O.C.

fulfilment of the Redemption, delayed by the treachery of Judas, Jewish idolatry and 'Christian' disobedience: so that the conversion of the Jews really is the consummation towards which the whole history of Christendom should be directed, as was announced by St. Paul. But this, again, means, in a more concrete way, that the end of time will not come until everything is ready for the Advent of the Holy Spirit; and until the new identity of the symbol and its meaning shall have become a reality in each of them, without exception. Or, if that mode of expression is still too obscure: when souls, through love, regain the ability to understand symbols, this new clear-sightedness will be paramount, just as the breach created by human incomprehension was fatally effective. Let our eyes once be opened and Money, as well as the rest of the symbols, will again coincide with the Christ they all represent; the Fall will be retrieved and the work of Salvation, now fully effectual, will put an end to temporal history. Such will be the consequences of the conversion for which a seemingly relentless fate is preserving the Jewish people in its separation and its misery." (1)

Now a study of our author makes it abundantly clear that his impatience and creative restlessness are typically Jewish in character: and Jewish, too, is his consuming hunger and thirst for social (not socialist) righteousness. The really good Jew has always had a passionate concern for social justice; and the strong, balanced expostulations of a Hebrew voice like that of the modern publisher Victor Gollancz is eminently true to type. Thus, through his contemplation of the sorrows and sufferings of the Ancient People, Bloy's eyes are opened to see that this ministry of suffering is carried on, not by the Jews only, but by all those who by their poverty and their wretchedness and tribulation continue, often sublimely unconsciously, to pay the price of man's redemption. In a certain sense, though not wholly, those vicariously suffering wretches become a new Chosen People.

(1) Léon Bloy: A Study in Impatience pp.126-127

Expression is given to this idea in a remarkable lecture delivered by Bloy at a Christian workmen's club in December 1903. The substance of what he said in that "little modern catacomb without a landlord" is well worthy of a place at this point. He gives it under the caption:

"THE PEOPLE OF GOD IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY.

Mentioning that in ages past the People of God was the Hebrew People, Bloy goes on to say:

"Ever since Jesus Christ the people of God is every one of us; it is I, it is you, the cabinet-maker, you the locksmith. you the clerk, the garbage-collector or the poet. It is everyone who is poor, everyone who suffers, everyone who is deeply humiliated. It is a vast flock in the wilderness, an infinite multitude of sad hearts in quest of Paradise. Some among them barely earn their bread, never have an hour in which to cultivate their souls and end by denying they have any."

Their plight is truly deplorable because "as for the Léon Bloys, when there are any to be found, they are so successfully strangled and smothered that it is impossible to know them and there is no means of hearing them."

Continuing his description of the modern people of God, he says:

"It is enough to make one die of wonder to reflect, for instance, that here is some poor shipping clerk of between eighteen and twenty-five, a poor devil on an employee who pushes a pen on some administrative paper only to copy filthy nonsense, who will keep on with this until death, without hope, growing increasingly brutish, and yet whose soul cost the Son of God his life!.... After which, reflect that this unfortunate is also an aristocrat, a kind of courtier or king's favourite, as compared with other slaves of the kingdom. Think of the fact that there are other hundreds of millions who do not even know that God exists, and who are being knocked about from morning to night. Is it to these that Jesus Christ said: Leave everything, sell everything, forsake everything and follow me? Assuredly, since no one is cut off from preaching the Gospel. Let this multitude answer: 'We have nothing to leave, nothing to sell, and, as we possess nothing, not even our bodies or our souls, we don't know what to renounce. We do not refuse to follow you, but we are desolate souls, lost in gloom. If we grope to the right: is that your Heart, O Jesus? is that the Wound in Your

Side? If we grope to the left, is it the Devil who will take us by the hand?... Reflect, if it please you, Lord, that there never was a God who had a more pitiful people."

Concluding his thought-provoking speech, (How many of his immediate audience, one wonders, would have caught the gist of his meaning? And yet, when heart talks to heart words are not everything?) Bloy goes on to say:

"I am come to tell you that we are all of us, in a body, most interesting wretches, since we are the People of God, and since we are not landlords. But such language cannot suit anything but souls! And I naturally assumed that you had souls. Your souls! Ah! I am constantly thinking of those invisible roaring fires! Question the first bourgeois you meet. He will tell you that the serious business of life is to keep one's guts filled. This being the case, I have never been serious and I declare that I don't know how to talk to a piece of meat. You have just had a proof of it." (1)

Bloy sums up his entire disgust for the "cochons" in these last few sentences.

Even before the present writer had taken up the study of Léon Bloy, the problem of the Jew in history had intrigued his mind, and in the middle of the 1939-45 war he had come to conclusions which bear comparison with those reached by the author of Le Salut par les Juifs more than half a century before. The ideology of the sentiments differs somewhat from that employed by Bloy, but the meaning is substantially the same. It is, therefore, peculiarly relevant that the appropriate passage from his book, the Healing Nation, should now be mentioned: (2)

"We must attempt to sum up and bring to its conclusion the argument unfolded in our previous chapters. Perhaps this can best be done by a brief reflection of the 'goodness and severity of God' in allowing the Jews, the Chosen People, to be cast off

(1) Quatre Ans de Captivité a Cochons-sur-Marne pp.1090-1093 O.C. Tr.Fr. Léon Bloy: Pilgrim of the Absolute pp.224-227.

(2) Passage given in double spacing to facilitate reading.

with the intent that the wild olive of the Gentile world might be grafted in, so that it might 'partake with them, of the root and fatness of the olive tree.' (1)

John Macmurray has found in the Jew the clue to history. The Hebrew consciousness is essentially religious, as opposed to the Gentile consciousness which is essentially dualistic. The Greeks expressed the contemplative side of human life, while the Romans stressed the practical. Throughout history the dualism between thought and action has remained. The purpose of history is to bring these two complementary aspects of human life into undivided unity. To achieve this very end the Jewish religious consciousness required to be dissipated over the face of the earth. In this way the wholeness of human life and consciousness, and the false antithesis of 'sacred' and 'secular' ~~were~~ to be appreciated by the Gentile world.

This messianic task of the Hebrew People, however, has been perilous to the extreme. It has involved the Jews in unimagined sufferings and persecutions. Simply because they could not alter the reality of their being - their undivided religious consciousness - simply because they could not help being Jews, they had to suffer the unmitigated fury of their opposite, the dualistic mentality. Macmurray is right in showing that this is the real reason for Hitler's fanatical antagonism to the Jew. (2)

(1) Rom. 11.17.

(2) See The Clue to History p.226.

Christianity, though itself the chief product of Hebrew consciousness, acquiesced, as we have seen, (1) in the dualism of the Gentile consciousness. It contented itself with an autonomy over the 'sacred' otherworldly sphere and relegated the control of the 'secular' this-worldly affairs to the 'powers that be'. The Jew can never be converted to this type of Christianity because it invited him to a denial of his own essence. But the genuine follower of Jesus the Jew should also repudiate such a Christianity, because it denies the express intention of the Master.

It is interesting to note that at certain crucial stages when Christianity tended to deviate from the authentic Christian intention, the work has been taken up by the Hebrew consciousness, outside the official Christian Church. The will to equality and social justice which has bred modern Communism was conceived by Marx, the Jew, and was messianic in its intention and results. And the systematic repudiation of idealist philosophy was undertaken by Bergson, also a Jew. It is a far cry from one French philosopher's Cogito ergo sum to the other French philosopher's doctrine of homo faber. Indeed, it would be no under-statement to say that Bergson has been the chief instrument by which religion has been restored to its true and rightful place in philosophy. Spinoza, who was, too, a son of Israel, certainly retained the wholeness of the religious consciousness, but his Pantheism was static in conception. Bergson, on the other hand,

(1) This has been discussed in Chapter 12(B) of The Healing Nation pp.39-40.

has introduced a timely dynamism into his whole philosophical outlook. Always when reading him I am reminded of the words of our Lord, 'My Father worketh hitherto and I work.'

The solution of the Jewish problem is the solution of the world problem. The latter can never be solved apart from the former. On the one hand, the Christian has to become Jewish in his outlook and consciousness. On the other hand, the Jew has to become Christian in the universality of the brotherhood he envisages. The Christian dream of world-wide brotherhood will remain a dream until it is wedded to the dynamic of the Hebrew religious consciousness.

One of the significant facts which is worth mentioning is that this whole issue of the place of the Jews in the world today is being discussed not only by philosophers and theologians, but by many men who are not, technically speaking, scholars at all. J.A. Curle, for example, who has travelled about the world more than most people, says in his Eskimo Pie:

'I think that this hardly beset, greatly talented race, with all its faults but with that one outstanding claim upon our sympathies, has become a test case for our Western civilisation. If we allow open hatred of the Jews - Jew-baiting of any sort - among our people: if we cannot find homes and shelter for all the refugees; if we let them all go to the wall; it will be the moral defeat of Christendom. And for the human future on earth we cannot allow earth's brainiest race to droop and die.'

(The underlined phrase, of course, has significance for students of Bloy undreamt of by Curle.)

And so we come to the 'Victory that Overcometh the World'. This victory will come only when the Hebrew consciousness, combined with the universalism of Christianity, circles the entire globe. Dualistic Christianity, with its idealistic universalism, which keeps world-brotherhood as a never-to-be achieved mental notion, will never win the victory. Hebrew consciousness with its limited solidarity of brotherhood confined to the Chosen People will never win the victory. But just as in Jesus Christ the victory was won by the superb combination of Hebrew consciousness plus universality of outlook, so in the genuine extension of the Incarnation, where Hebrew consciousness marches steadily with the universal outlook, the victory of world-wide honest-to-goodness brotherhood will be won. This will be the victory of God - not the victory of even the most elevated of non-religious humanism. For the victory of God is the victory of man. And only through the victory of God will man accomplish his victory. Gregory of Nyassa was right: "Christ infused Himself into our perishable nature, that by Communion with the Deity mankind might at the same time be deified." (1)

It is no accident, but a portent of profound significance that the Founder and president of the Society for the Constitution of the Service Nation is one who has assimilated as very few have done, the essence of the Christian message, and at the same time has remained a Hebrew of the Hebrews. I first came into contact with Hugh J. Schonfield twenty-four years

(1) Or. Cat., 37.

ago (written in 1945) when, as a young convert to Christianity, he spoke during a great revival which spread through the fishing towns and villages of north-east Scotland. He has travelled far since those days, and in his book, Judaism and World-Order, he says, and, from his point of view, says truly - (Did not Léon Bloy affirm that the Jews had every right to await their Messiah?)

'The Messiah, the Messianic People and the Messianic Age are three inseparables. All must be together when the day of redemption dawns. Until the spirit of God is manifested in the conduct of the nations, the time of Israel's trials will not yet be over. Until the sufferings of Israel are ended the Messianic Age will not be revealed. So Judaism through bitter experience watches the world, watches the state of the Jews, and watches every messianic claimant. Only when all the signs are present will the day of deliverance have arrived.' (1)
(cf. Isa. 11.1-12)

For the Christian the Messiah has already come, but we look for His second appearance. For the Jew He has not yet come, and he looks for His first appearance. But both Christian and Jew look for the King of the Millennial Era when 'They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain; for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea.' (2) They both look to the time when 'He shall set up an ensign for the nations, and shall assemble the outcasts of Israel, and gather together the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth.' (3) (4)

A most cogent argument for the solution of the difficulties between Christians and Jews is given in Prof Ragaz's little book, Israel, Judaism and Christianity (5). For example he says:

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- (1) Judaism and World Order p.35
 - (2) Isa.11.9.
 - (3) Isa.11.12.
 - (4) The Healing Nation pp.180-183.
 - (5) See Israel, Judaism and Christianity pp.26 ff.

"A Christian (to use this name in the very highest sense) may consider faith in God's kingdom on earth to be so essential that he feels more closely related to a Jew who has his faith, although he does not confess Christ, than to another Christian who confesses Christ without this faith. This happens to be my own case. It is a powerful aid to union: Union against paganism on the one hand and a false Judaism or a false Christianity on the other."(1)

Surely now it is rather a remarkable 'sign of the times' that the question of 'Israel' is enagaging the interest of Christian theologians as well as of Jewish. The writings of W.J. Pythian-Adams are taken up largely with this theme. Indeed there is a great deal of truth in his assertion that "the Church has forgotten that it is Israel", and attributes that fact to the "ultimate origin of our divisions".(2) The Church has to "Look beyond itself" and its more or less static conception of salvation, "to the priestly work of Israel."(3)

Then we have the writings of Prof. Leonhard Ragaz (just mentioned), which are very little known in this country. The only brochure translated into English is entitled Israel, Judaism and Christianity, in which he gives a most adequate summary of his general treatise. His argument is that Judaism and Christianity are the two trunks into which the tree called Israel is split. They must be re-united by returning to the central truth of their religion, the message of God's Kingly rule for this earth.

Ragaz, too, is obviously an 'impatient', and one in whom Léon Bloy would have found a kindred soul. He was a minister of the Swiss Reformed Church in the Grison Alps and afterwards at the

(1) Israel, Judaism and Christianity p.28

(2) The Way of At-One-Ment p.48.

(3) Ibid. - p.46.

Cathedral of Basle. Thereafter he became a professor of theology at the University of Zurich. But he gave up both ministry and professorship in order to fulfil his mission of giving the message of God's Kingly Rule for this earth, through writing and through educational work among the workers of Zurich.

Israel, Judaism and Christianity is, from its own peculiar angle, a complete endorsement of Le Salut par les Juifs, though it lacks the poetry and haunting mysticism of the latter. Ragaz, too, homologates Bloy's conception of time:

"Mere chronological time is of no importance whatever. What matters is time in the inward sense, real history-time - which is the eternal present." (1) "... not human time but God's. 'A thousand years to Thee are like a day that is past, and as a night's watching.'...God's will, His promise and demand on the one hand, and - on the other - man himself are eternally present." (2)

In a critical passage where the Swiss theologian appeals to the Jews to understand their sufferings, it may well be the voice of Léon Bloy we are hearing again:

"As regards the Jews, two considerations may help them on their side to find a bridge across the blood-filled chasm. (i.e. the ghastly rift between Jewry and Christianity.)

In the first place, they might find in persecution and anti-semitism a punishment for their rejection of Jesus. But heaven forbid that this rejection should ever be accepted as a justification! For - apart from the fact that the Jews' rejection could never exonerate their persecutors - have not the Christians rejected Him also? Are not they rejecting Him daily? Only the Jews themselves can view the injustice and the horrors they have suffered as an expiation. (In a small, a very small measure, the Jews have repaid their own polemics against Christianity, all through the centuries. Perhaps the Jews might admit this, among themselves.)

Another thought, however, delves much deeper into the truth and attains greater heights: the thought that suffering, in its most sacred sense, is part of Israel's mission; that Israel, as God's

(1) Israel, Judaism and Christianity p.25

(2) Ibid p.42.

suffering servant, acts as the Gentiles' vicar - and as such has the right to expect an exaltation in proportion to its service. Thus, Jewry faces Jesus in a different way. For it is, after all, with Jesus that they are concerned, with Him who spoke on the Cross: "Father forgive them, for they know not what they do." With Him - not with Christians or Christianity. He is the Redeemer. He restores Israel to new life and grandeur." (1)

Returning now to Le Salut: as far as we can judge, the Jews' anticipation of the Messianic era seems to coincide, more or less, with Bloy's anticipation of the Dispensation of the Holy Spirit, when Christ, at long last un-nailed from the Cross of Jewish repudiation, will return to set the prisoners free and usher in the Third Era of the Holy Trinity. In all likelihood the appearance of the eschatological Being who was to be expected was just as much a mystery to Léon Bloy as it is to those who are endeavouring to get to the bottom of his religious thought. And most certainly Bloy would be the last person in the world to rob such a portentous Advent of any of its mystery. In characteristically dramatic style, Bloy brings Le Salut to an end in the following words: (It is Israel who is speaking.)

"It will then be quite a simple matter for Him to descend - this Crucified Redeemer - since the Cross of His shame is precisely the image and infallible likeness of the wandering Liberator, whom He called nineteen centuries ago - and doubtless too, it will be understood that I am myself this Cross, from the head to the feet!..

FOR THE SALVATION OF THE WORLD IS NAILED UPON ME, ISRAEL, and it is from ME that He must 'come down'".

Every time that Le Salut is read, some new depth of insight seems to stand out in clearer focus, and this is really one of the

(1) Israel, Judaism and Christianity p.66

(2) Le Salut par les Juifs Tr. in Appendix p.90.

main reasons why the present writer has taken the time and trouble to have it translated^{it} in its entirety into English. It is a mine from which ever-new treasures may be dug. Struggling to understand at least some of the profound meaning of his frightfully compressed message, which must be received by the heart even more than by the mind, we have no difficulty in believing him when, in a letter to René Martineau, written long after the book was composed, he says:

"When I think of what this book costs, I am tempted to believe that it must, in some wise, have had a share of the sweat of Gethsemane. 'I have shed such drops of blood for you,' said Pascal, causing our Lord to speak. It will, then, be with these drops that I have been able to write Le Salut par les Juifs, and perhaps others, too. Let this thought - too bold by far, I fear - be forgiven me." (1)

This chapter, which shows the intense labour that has been expended in mastering Le Salut, and which has grown lengthy in the process, would still be incomplete if we did not include Bloy's wonderful post-script to Le Pèlerin de l'Absolu, and so with that passage we bring the chapter to its fitting close:

"A friend of mine and of my books, attracted particularly to Le Salut par les Juifs, a most singular preference surely, on the part of a man with little education, especially as he would require to appreciate a work of that calibre, which is certainly beyond the reach of the multitude: this friend, then, a Commercial Traveller, never went on his rounds without a copy of this book which he has read a great number of times.

Here now is the astonishing thing that happened to him:

At Tours, on the 21st February 1914, he was forced to wait near the post-office. Rain compelled him to seek refuge in a café where, naturally, he began to read Le Salut par les Juifs. A shadow fell suddenly on his paper. This shadow continued to remain for a while. Raising his head he saw a carpet-seller in

(1) Le Vieux de la Montagne p.407.

Arab costume, who kept looking at him silently. This stranger, dirty and rather loathesome, appeared to be from 80 to 500 years old, as no computation of age was possible. Splendid as a prophet, his eyes of a fixity and unbearable brilliance, had such a depth that it seemed, in plunging into them, you would have to go to the end of the centuries. As closely as may well be, such were the expressions of the narrator, who related me this adventure a few days afterwards.

Extraordinarily impressed, my friend invited the stranger to sit down and asked him if he were an Israelite. On receiving an affirmative answer he showed him my book.

'Do you know this?'

The man drew from his pocket seven small notebooks covered with Hebrew characters:

'This,' said he, 'and that (pointing to my book) are the same thing.'

My friend then learned that those notebooks were really Le Salut par les Juifs, translated into Hebrew and divided into seven portions, so that the entire book, read every night, could be completed in a week.

'There are,' continued the stranger, 'two of my Israelite brethren doing as I do, and who have with them these seven note-books. One is in Hamburg, the other in London. Every evening when work is over, at the same hour, all three of us read the same seventh portion of Léon Bloy etc., and the following week we begin it all over again!!!'

Having given this explanation and offered a few other words proving that he was well acquainted with my book, the unknown went away slowly and majestically like a prophet of ancient day, large tear-drops pouring down his face.

My friend, completely thunderstruck, was still, several hours afterwards, intoxicated with the incident, and even two days later, had not yet regained his composure." (1)

Would it not have been divinely ironical if the stranger's friend in Hamburg had been one of the Three Ancients described so fascinatingly by Bloy in Le Salut? (2)

(1) Le Pèlerin de l'Absolu pp.2005-2007 O.C.

(2) See Tr. in Appendix pp.10 ff.

CHAPTER 5 THE PILGRIM OF THE HOLY SEPULCHRE

Before we bring our study of Bloy's religious thought to an end, it is necessary that we should consider his attitude to Art in general. It will be remembered that Oscar Wilde once remarked that an ethical sympathy in an artist is an unpardonable mannerism of style. Bloy, however, as accomplished an artist as Wilde assumes a diametrically opposite point of view:

"If Art is part of my baggage, so much the worse for me! My only recourse is the expedient of placing at the service of Truth what has been given me by the Father of Lies. A precarious device; for the business of Art is to fashion Gods!" (1)

Bloy had no interest in the maxim, "Art for art's sake." But he had a passionate concern for Art in the service of Truth. A statement that is reputed to have been made by the Irish playwright St John Ervine sums up to perfection the whole attitude of the magnificent French prosateur - "The world needs dynamic Christianity - Christianity that is aggressive against evil and violently prejudiced in favour of virtue." For Bloy does not in the first instance speak as an artist without qualification; but as an advocate who uses the medium of Art to serve the interests of Truth. As he says:

"...a perfectly true thought, expressed in very sound terms can satisfy the reason without giving any impression of the Beautiful; but in that case certainly there is something false in the statement. It is essential that Truth be in Glory. Splendour of style is not a luxury: it is a necessity." (2)

As Jacques Maritain says in his introduction to his wife's

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- (1) La Femme Pauvre p.226 O.C. (Tr. fr. Léon Bloy: Pilgrim of the Absolute p.112
 (2) Le Mendiant Ingrat Vol.11.p.40 Tr, fr. Ibid p.122

anthology of Bloy:

"A writer of genius, devoted to beauty as to one of the names of Him who is, jealous of the purity and integrity of his Art - which he never prostituted - he makes of that very art, in perpetual magnificence and splendour a monstrosity of truth." (1)

Lest, now, it be assumed that Bloy was 'talking through his hat' when he attributed his artistic facility to the 'Father of Lies', we had better remember the drastic censorship exercised by Socrates on the artistic forms which were to be allowed into his Republic. In the Third Book of The Republic, the 'corrupter of Athenian youth' is pretty severe on the classical poets who introduce into their works references to theology and morality of an unworthy character. His strictures against certain forms of music are also rather scathing. For example he says:

"When a man surrenders himself to music and flute-playing, and suffers his soul to be flooded through the funnels of his ears with those sweet and soft and plaintive harmonies..., and spends his whole life in warbling and delighting himself with song, such a man at the outset, tempers like steel whatever portion of the spirited element he possesses, and makes it useful instead of brittle and useless: if, however, he relaxes not in his devotion, but yields to the enchantment, he begins to liquify and waste away, till the spirit is melted out of him, and the sinews of his soul are extirpated, and he is made 'a feeble wielder of the lance'." (2)

A parallel to this kind of censorship, which the Absolute must enjoin, seeing that it is dealing with man's immortal soul, is to be found in the first part of La Femme Pauvre, where Bohemond de l'Isle-de France and Marchenoir (alias Villiers de Isle-Adam and Bloy) engage in a discussion on the artistic and

(1) Léon Bloy: Pilgrim of the Absolute p.18

(2) The Republic p.108

Christian significance of Wagner's work. It is common knowledge nowadays that the pseudo-religious and false mysticism of Wagner's famous operas, Tannhauser, Die Walküre &c. exercised an enormous influence upon the revolutionary tendencies of the Nazis, and that the composer was Hitler's favourite maker of music. But Marchenoir is not to be taken in by the idolatry of the German musician. He sees in the flamboyant music nothing but the prostitution of the Holy Catholic Church. (1)

"When music is not blessed by the Church," he articulated with great calmness, "it is like bad water infected by demons." (2)

Beethoven's genius, on the other hand, argues Bloy, made the listener bow his head and bend his knees in awe. The pronouncement of the man of the Absolute is quite uncompromising:

"Everything which is outside the Holy Catholic Church proceeds from Evil, emanates from Hell, necessarily, and absolutely, with no other enquiry or idle compromise." (3)

With Bloy, this is no far-fetched speculation: it springs naturally from one of his deepest religious convictions - the Fall and its dread consequences:

"Modern Art," he says, "is a rebellious servant who has usurped his master's position. I have sometimes denounced with a bitterness that may appear excessive and in infallible terms, the astonishing foolishness of our precious Christians and the vile hatred with which they remunerate the Beautiful. During the last three or four centuries, Catholics and non-Catholics of every possible stripe have done all they could to debase man's imagination. On this sole point, heretics and orthodox have been continually unanimous.

The order issued to the one and to the other by the Almighty of the Nether Regions was to wipe out the memory of the Fall. After which, under the pretext of restoring man's status,

(1) See Portrait of Léon Bloy pp.82-83

(2) La Femme Pauvre p.216 O.C.

Ibid p.217 O.C.

antiquity's love of the Flesh was given a renaissance with all the consequences thereof. Cathedrals crumbled into dust, holy nakedness gave way to sensuous forms, and all rhythms were taken over by Lechery. The stiff lines which the honesty of the Middle Ages had assigned to its non-fleshly presentations of the Martyrs took on curves the moment they had been broken, following the inexorable law of societies which a sublime childlikeness had for an instant abrogated, and they became foliated ornaments on the altar of Pan. That is, I think, the point at which we have totally arrived." (1)

So now we see with what rueful enthusiasm Bloy accepted Art and any artistic endowment he possessed from the Father of Lies! Therefore, for Bloy, Art

"is foreign to the essence of the Church, useless to her essential life, and those who practise it have not even the right to exist if they are not her very humble servants. She owes them her most motherly protection, since she sees in them the most sorrowful and frail of her children, but if they grow up big and handsome, all she can do is to exhibit them from afar to the multitude, like wild beasts, whom it is dangerous to come near." (2)

Like Plato's Socrates, Bloy is critical of theatrical art as well. Asked by a friend why he was weeping in the theatre, he

he replied, "It is because of those poor devils there, who allow themselves to be damned just to give me a bit of pleasure." (3)

He said further:

"I defy anyone to procure me a man who is capable of saying his prayers at night when he returns from seeing a comedy or a dramatic production which has not bored him stiff." (4)

This dread of the Arts and the incompatibility of an uncritical appreciation of Art and the living of the good life is also seen in the critical comments passed by Bloy on the various spheres of Art. In this matter Bollery puts the case rather well:

(1) La Femme Pauvre pp.220-221 O.C. Tr.fr. Léon Bloy Pilgrim of the Absolute p.109

(2) Ibid p.222 O.C. Tr.fr. Ibid p. 110

(3) Léon Bloy (Essai de biographie) Vol.11. p.97

(4) Ibid p.92

"Paul Alexis is perfectly right when, referring to Léon Bloy, he says that he writes criticism between inverted commas. Léon Bloy is certainly not a critic in the accepted sense of the word. When he judges a work, whatever it may be, he does not treat it as a function of art or literature. He speaks in the name of truth by Truth which has been defined by Him who said "Ego sum veritas", although he knows perfectly how to recognise splendour of style and art whenever they are to be found, and to express his regret wherever they are absent." (1)

Because Bloy is so acutely conscious of the fearful dangers attendant upon Imagination "within which lies everything diabolic and everything divine", he constitutes himself a self-appointed censor of the arts no less meticulously severe than was Plato, speaking through the lips of Socrates. The finest exposition of the task he has assumed, in the face of contemporary literature, is to be found in his Belluaires et Porchers. (Tamers of Wild Beasts and Herdsmen of Swine.)

There he states:

"Those who triumph are of two kinds: Fighters of Wild Beasts and Swineherds.

The former are created to tame monsters, the latter to graze their hogs. Between a war-lord herding his wild animals to their forest pasture and a stock market swindler shoving the herds to their repast of acorns, no room is found for a third category of dominators...

To begin with, the Church was true to the first category. She produced terrible conquerors, following close upon a Master who had declared himself a bearer of fire and the sword, and who had hired them as workers in the vineyard.

But Christianity is in its death-agony at present, and seems utterly devoid of strength... We die of homesickness for Being. The Church, which should suckle within us the foreboding of the Infinite, has for three hundred years lain in a death-agony, ever since her breasts were hacked off. There remains capable

(1) Léon Bloy (Essai de biographie) Vol.11. p.90.

of reviving us only the She-wolf of Art, were it not that men hurl stones at the last rash souls who still seek sustenance from her brass dugs...

As long as the pain-ridden race of Adam's children shall continue on this earth there will be men hungering for the Beautiful and the Infinite, just as men hunger for bread...But they will be persecuted...hunted as incendiaries or well-poisoners, and abhorred by women with fleshly eyes who will see them only as ragamuffins..."(1)

Of the Imagination, itself, Bloy holds a most elevated conception: it is perfectly wonderful, but abjectly indisciplined:

"The artist's master faculty - the imagination - is naturally and passionately anarchic. It pays no heed to orders dispatched or pre-arranged meeting places; it lives upon its own substance, like a will-o'-the-wisp. Creation is its prey, the angels are its victuallers and the universe is the camping ground of its choice. The infinitude of space is its lookout, from whence to explore the whole expanse of the centuries. It is the mother of Alpha and the younger sister of Omega, and the symbolic snake is its girdle when it dons its high regalia in order to think upon God alone, of whom it is the deep mirror." (2)

But Art may prostitute the Imagination, and that was the one crime which Bloy could in no wise tolerate:

"The deliberate degradation of the Word is undeniably one of the basest outrages one can meditate. When a miserable spawner of serial fiction befouls himself daily, like some hideous baboon on his ground floor apartment, to the delight of an abject public, that is his trade, and there isn't even enough about him to warrant contempt. But when a writer of talent, in order to increase his sales, to get himself read by women and notaries, to promote himself in the hierarchy of glory, lowers his mind to such garbage, and forces his pen to serve as a toothpick for well-stuffed imbeciles whose dishes he hopes he may some day wipe up - we then have a treachery which must be exposed, if possible, with brass bugle and trumpets, for here is Eternal Beauty degrading herself upon a pillory." (3)

Against such a pitiful trahison des clercs some action must surely be taken. And so Bloy makes his resolve:

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- (1) Tr. fr. Belluaires et Porchers in Léon Bloy; Pilgrim of the Absolute pp.103-105
(2) Tr. fr. Ibid in Ibid pp.106-107
(3) Tr. fr. Ibid in Ibid p. 108

"There is a transcendental police job which I have resolved to do, if only I have the strength. This is to expose the wicked in literature: those who steal and those who grovel. For these two species threaten to devour everything.

The thieves are pure plagiarists, and their crime is easily detected. They snatch away the children of others and emasculate them in order to sell them with profit to the gelders of boy sopranos.

The grovellers are the worshippers of success before no matter what altar. And such are prostitutes and Iscariots.

"All Art that dreams of applause abdicates; it places its crown on the brow of the mob."

This wonderful reflection comes from Ernest Hello, one of the greatest of modern writers..." (1)

And so, placing the trumpet to his lips, Léon Bloy gives one concluding blast, in no uncertain sound:

"Mine is a twin trumpet, equipped with two mouthpieces: one for the Hue and Cry, the other for Hosannah. I have thought it needful to summon before me the true and the false artists; the tamers of those savage spirits who obey none but the deeply virile; and the assassins of virility, the herders of beasts for the slaughter-house. The night is upon us, the terrible night during which men shall no more labour, says the Gospel; but who knows whether books such as this may not have the power to bring forth at last a dawn of an intellectual sense of shame which might begin to cast its light upon the heights and the depths?" (2)

O that his trumpet might sound forth to-day to clear an atmosphere that is befouled with trite literature and the trivialities of the public press! A few years ago at a conference of Modern Churchmen in Bristol, St John Ervine gives us a pretty fair picture of that atmosphere. The playwright said then:

"Our illiterate ancestors, who spent Sunday morning in Church listening to the pastor reading fine prose from the the Bible and the Book of Common Prayer were better employed than our contemporaries, who debauch their minds with the execrable English of the Sunday Press - such minds, that is,

(1) Tr. fr. Belluaires et Porchers in Léon Bloy; Pilgrim of the Absolute pp.107-108

(2) Tr. fr. Ibid in Ibid pp.108-109

as are left after the cinemas have finished with them."

This, however, is putting the case rather mildly. Just how far the secularising and brutalising of the atmosphere in which public opinion grows and develops, will go, may be judged from a perusal of Court Room by Quentin Reynolds. As it has been impossible to read this book in the meantime, the present writer can only offer extracts from a review of it by Ernest Camon in the British Weekly. If it does not shatter the complacency of some people, then nothing else will:

"I found myself seeing into the minds and morals of a people who would be the saviours of civilisation and whose leaders have lately adopted Christianity in a way, to my mind, something like Pointz's cases of buckram. This book made me alternately furious and sick with horror; and despairing, when I remembered how well this country is aping the real American way of life. It was not so much the enormity of the crimes committed, but those 'unobstrusive' people from whom these brutes so easily emerged, a people whose savage standards allowed to read these stories, willingly supplied by the Press, and to cry for more: and by familiarity to accept the continuance of these crimes and even prepare themselves mentally to commit them..."

Illustrating, Camon quotes from the book:

"'...her name spread on the front pages of every New York newspaper. The papers screamed that she had been the victim of a brutal attempt at rape...As a story this one had everything, and the newspapers, quite understandably played it for all it was worth.'"

Reynolds points out that the Christian Science Monitor is the only daily newspaper in America which does not headline murder cases involving sex, but then the Monitor is tax-free and subsidised! "

Camon continues:

"The reader who is Christian enough to throw up his hands in blindly prudish horror at the depravity shown here, or to

bolster his complacency with 'there but for the Grace of God go I' should be imbued with more determination by reading this book. Reynolds is fond of the word "~~unobstrusive~~"; for him the perfect American citizen seems to be the obscure little man going quietly about his private enterprise."

"There," grimly comments the reviewer, "is the core of the failure of the so-called humanity and enlightenment of these people. Not only is this little man apathetic about himself and his neighbours, but inside his hollow mind, under the veneer, there is that hard lump of brutality which can derive pleasure from reading lurid newspapers. And by his very ~~unobstrusiveness~~ and 'mind your own business' attitude, he spreads his disease. a disease more dangerous than the obvious brutality of political creeds or race theories." (1)

No more pertinent summing-up of the atmosphere of depraved mediocrity could have been given - an atmosphere fit only for the "cochons" so fiercely stigmatised by the author of Quatre ans de Captivité à Cochons - sur - Marne, etc. Is it any wonder that one cries out for an antiseptic douche of the Bloyan Absolute?.

From the views so far expressed it will be seen that Bloy sternly discourages the possibility of Christian Art, which had been so ardently advocated by Hello "in the madness of his zeal".

"Art is aboriginally a parasite of the skin of the first Serpent. From this origin it derives its immense pride and suggestive power. It suffices unto itself, like a God, and the bejewelled crowns of princes compared to the lightning flashes of its headdress, look like rude circlets of iron. It is as rebellious to worship as it is to obedience, and the will of no man bends it towards any altar. It may consent from the over-abundance of its splendour to give alms to temples or palaces, when it finds some sort of advantage in doing so, but let no one ask of it even a supererogatory wink of the eye." (2)

(1) See The British Weekly Feb. 15. 1951.

(2) Tr. fr. Un Breelan d'Excommuniés in Léon Bloy: Pilgrim of the Absolute p.113.

Discussing the development of Art through the centuries Bloy is of the opinion that the Middle Ages come nearest to a Christian Art.

"Then Cathedrals were built...Stone and metal were violated for the sake of giving birth to heavenly and infernal effigies such as man had never seen. Hymns so beautiful were sung that our unbelieving generation still weeps on hearing them. A little later men began to paint, and for three sublime centuries Christians were able to convince themselves that they at last had bent low before Jesus Christ the ancient henchmen of the awful Gods.

The Renaissance in timeblew these illusions away...

Today experience has sufficiently revealed this antinomy, and it needed the stubborn innocence of Ernest Hello to hope that such an old rebel would submit. Yet it seems to me that the extreme incompatibility of modern art with the requirements of a practical Catholicism should in themselves have warned so astute a metaphysician of the presence of some mystery..."(1)

Such, then, were the views of Léon Bloy on the new forms of Art (e.g. symbolist poetry and impressionist painting and music) which were then coming into vogue. Yet, though he underlines the incompatibility of modern art and the practice of the Christian life, he does not disclaim that there may be Christian artists. His friend de Groux, the painter, is a case in point, and Verlaine,

"The unique man...for whom everyone had grown weary of hoping or dreaming, a Christian Poet."(2)

"Verlaine," says Bloy, "is a religious poet of so singular a sweetness that one might think it eucharistic. It is not so much the things he says which move us: they were said long before him by every religious writer, with endless elucidations. It is not even the papal authority of his verse or the matchless play of his metres; it is the accent, the ineffable accent of his lover's faith." (3)

(1) Tr.fr. Un Breelan d'Excommuniés in Léon Bloy: Pilgrim of the Absoluté p.114.

(2) Ibid. p.115:

(3) Ibid. p.118.

Rouault, too, (who was to become the world-famous painter) in the eyes of Bloy, was a "Christian" artist, but then Rouault was a "man of prayer". Still, one or two men of prayer are not enough for Art once again to effect the reconciliation between freedom and the beauty of forms. Mme. Maritain is of the opinion that "what is needed is the breadth of a whole epoch, a Middle Ages inspired by faith, or a Renaissance in which faith yields its last and most beautiful flower, as in Rembrandt or in Zurbaran". (1)

Let us, now, be perfectly clear as to Bloy's use and understanding of his art. Not infrequently men of letters have deliberately employed the medium of literature to serve some political or social end. Such artists, for example, as Dickens, Charles Reade and Harriet Beecher Stowe immediately leap to our mind in this connection. Be it stated, however, in no unmistakable terms, that Bloy made no attempt to use his art to bring about social reform. The "gospel of Progress" was not his gospel. As has been said before, though all out for social justice and the "under-dog", he would have been much more at home in the Middle Ages than he was in the sophisticated, scientific age of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

His method, as an artist, is almost unique in the sphere of literature. For his whole aim and object is to bring the soul of man to an awareness of its native dimension of the Absolute, which it had lost by reason of the Fall. This he endeavours to achieve by his symbolism of poverty and money. His self-chosen life of

(1) We have been Friends together p.162.

poverty and the burden of all his work are outstanding testimonies to the fact that he was not concerned with the outward framework of man's material existence, but passionately concerned with the unseen, intangible environment of man's soul.

In perhaps the most crucial passage not only of La Femme Pauvre, where it actually occurs, but of his entire work, Léon Bloy makes a clear and unanswerable reply to the challenge thrown out to him by his fellow-artists - "If you are not an artist, what then are you?"

"I am a Pilgrim of the Holy Sepulchre!" replied Marchenoir in his fine, deep and clear voice which ordinarily set cocks' combs and turkeys' wattles quivering,

"I am that and nothing more. Life has no other object, and the folly of the Crusades is what has most honoured the human reason. Prior to scientific cretinism, even children knew that the Saviour's Sepulchre is the centre of the universe, the pivot and the heart of all worlds. The earth can revolve around the sun as much as you wish. I grant you that, but on condition that this latter star, which is not informed of our astronomic laws, quietly proceed to circle round that imperceptible point, and that the billions of systems making up the wheel of the Milky Way continue the movement. The inconceivable heavens have no other task than to mark the position of an ancient stone whereon Jesus slept for three days.

Having been born, to my unspeakable grief, in a ghostly century wherein this rudimentary notion is totally forgotten, could I do better than take up the staff of ancient travellers who believed in the infallible fulfilment of God's Word?

I am satisfied to believe with them that the Holy Place is once again to become, at the appointed time, the episcopal and royal seat of that Word which will judge all words..." (1)

With an over-ruling passion of such a character, we can understand that Bloy could not help exercising a powerful spiritual influence over the souls of many people. We have already referred to his relationship with his god-children

(1) La Femme Pauvre pp.225-226 Tr.fr. Léon Bloy: Pilgrim of the Absolute pp.111-112

Oscar Cullmann's book Christus und die Zeit (Christ and Time) is a scholarly exposition of the argument contained in this passage. Cullmann shows with masterly cogency how the Christ-event is the crucial - or mid-point of time. See esp. diag. on p.82.

the Maritains and his friendship with Pierre Termier, the scientist. And in a letter to Frère Dacien, he mentions how he first came into touch with a Dutch family, the Van der Meers:

"A young Dutch poet, married to an amiable woman and father of a charming little boy came and found me and said simply, 'I am not a Christian, and would like to become one. Your books have determined the matter for me. Shew me the road: bring me to a worthy priest that I may be instructed.' I was able to set his mind at rest immediately; and on the 24th of February the baptism of the father and son took place... Just think, dear brother, how our poor hearts beat! Then, what a benediction on myself, upon my books as an author! Many priests and a few bishops even, may find fault with my books. But it appears that the Holy Spirit does not scorn them nor find fault with them, since they can produce such effects.

The van der Meers...have renewed for me the sublimely beautiful and divine adventure of the Maritains. They are souls of the same calibre...&c"(1)

Later on, in 1933, the van der Meers entered the Benedictine order, to which they had first given their children.

From time to time Léon Bloy was greatly heartened by such words of encouragement as the following:

(From a letter sent by a Priest in 1909)

"I cannot but believe that God blesses the readers of your books. I often return to them with devotion, as a man visits a famous shrine because God reveals Himself more there than elsewhere." (2)

In his later life and after his death, the unconquerable spirit of Léon Bloy has touched, and continues to touch many a sincerely seeking soul. It is the considered opinion of the humble Protestant admirer who has endeavoured, rather stumblingly, it must be confessed, to compose the present study on his religious thought, that were a couple of hundred souls induced to live and move and have their being in the Absolute as

(1) Lettres a l'abbé Cornuau et au Frère Dacien p.118.

(2) Le Vieux de la Montagne p.229.

as Bloy did, it would be the beginning of a new epoch of hope and liberation for the soul of man, which is at present bound in the fatal cords of fear and frustration.

The late Nicolas Berdyaev, in the recently published book, Dream and Reality (An Essay in Autobiography) makes delightful reference to his first contact with the widow Madame Bloy when he found refuge in Paris some years after the 1914-18 War, and tells us that he had introduced Bloy to the Russian people several years before the latter's death. In quite a number of his books this distinguished writer on the Philosophy of Religion has made appreciative mention of the French author. We may be sure that when a man of the calibre of Berdyaev takes notice of a writer, that writer has got something to say. Furthermore, the bibliography cited at the end of Résurrection: Léon Bloy (including French, Belgian, Dutch, Danish and German writers) makes it abundantly clear that Bloy is exercising now a growing influence over the minds of European thinkers. This influence is likely to spread to English-speaking countries as well. If we try to seek the reason for such an interest, we must state quite plainly that it was not due primarily to the literary merit of Bloy's works. Rather was it because throughout all his forty odd books and voluminous correspondence he was content to remain The Pilgrim of the Holy Sepulchre.

Not infrequently a man's true measure has been taken not by his friends but by his enemies. And this chapter may well close

with an article written in Les Hommes du Jour, an anarchist leaflet published in 1909 by Victor Meric, who apparently "does not like Bloy", but "bows his knees before him" and acknowledged him to be "the greatest writer of the ages".

"Here then is this writer, such that no century has offered his like. No one, like him, has kicked up so much fury, even when it is admiration he is expressing. It is not easy, mind you, to understand him, and he himself cares little whether he is being followed. Down here he carried through his mission, which is to pour contempt and disgust upon his contemporaries, while he awaits the advent of the Redeemer. But heavens! - what a work! And what a bewitching artist! What an incomparable graver of phraser is this stercoraceous apocalyptic!

Some folk with a sour grouse don't want to see the artist in him. They just want to see the pamphleteer. 'Pamphleteer', he wrote to Emmanuel Signoret, 'Ah! I am something more than that... but if I am a pamphleteer, well, I am it through spiritual anger, through love; and I utter my cries in my gloomy despair, upon my plundered Ideal.' And again: 'People demand of me what is demanded of nobody else. They want me to write absolutely all the time after the mode of Léon Bloy. The day when they catch me writing in the mode of Paul Bourget or Anatole France, I will be told I have reached the paralytic stage.'

Let him reassure himself, however. When all the noise stirred up today round certain individuals, who have been magnified to the point of nausea, has died a natural death, people will come back to him, with bewilderment, it is true - yet they will come back. His work defies the ravages of time. It is colossal and imperishable. From Paradise, where he will sit down at the right hand of the Lord, Léon Bloy will be able to contemplate the procession of humans, humbled in infinite admiration. Let that certainty be a sweet savour to him. Oh! it is not that he is attractive, impelling sympathy at the first contact. He begins by disturbing; by terrifying. He is judged most diversely. Some folks take him to be a vile sort of fellow, others have a feeling that he is genuinely suffering. He is a pathological case according to some imbeciles. He is admired without being loved: he is read with frenzy, but with no joy. But, in the long run, what matters his acts of injustice and coarseness, his faults, his outbursts of anger? In his worst torments of violence, he remains the impeccable artist,

the inimitable calligraphist. All we need to see are his gifts. How prodigious they are! How stunning his animation! How amazing his magnificently-coined phrases and his terrifying virtuosity! So long as we have that, let him be hateful, vindictive, unutterably pompous - that's his own affair. Liar, sweep, exasperated, sick, mad, Genius, we salute him, the greatest pamphleteer ever seen stirring up the world since the far-distant days when the prophets used to denounce the vices of the Jewish people with bitter fury." (1)

Meric's prophecy has been fulfilled. Men and women are coming back to Bloy. Modern man, having lost his soul, is beginning to seek it again. When he is tired exploring the blind alley of "scientific progress", haply he will turn aside and desire access to a dimension which no microscope or telescope can discover, the dimension of the Absolute. Then Léon Bloy will be accepted as a true and trusted guide and men will follow him gladly and give God thanks. For he was a great sinner who was greatly saved. In von Hügel's oft-repeated word, Bloy knew with burning conviction the "costliness" of his redemption, and no one has opened the eyes of the soul to experience that "costliness" more than he. No one is ever the same man again once Bloy has touched his inner life. And so we take our leave of him with respect and deep gratitude, the Pilgrim of the Absolute, the Pilgrim of the Holy Sepulchre, who battled his way out of the chaos of a fallen world and emerged from the "groaning and travail of Creation", a mystical flower of the abyss with its petals aflame with the eternal light. (2)

(1) Le Vieux de la Montagne pp.331-332.

(2) See Wrestlers with Christ p.35.

INTRODUCTION

Le Salut par les Juifs, published in 1892, has been buried for twelve years. The editor was an excellent man, formed from earth's clay for the express purpose of the typographical production of this single work. He suddenly changed his trade, however, and walked off to his new premises with the boxes of unsold copies, for all the world like so much ivory. As we had made no contract, this printed book belonged APPENDIX TO half THE RELIGIOUS THOUGHT my books. I took notice OF detriment on page LÉON BLOY

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Supernatural inspiration apart, it might be said that Le Salut par les Juifs is undoubtedly the most energetic and the most urgent Christian testimony in favour of the Elder Race since the eleventh chapter of St Paul to the Romans.

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INTRODUCTION

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"If the casting away of them be the reconciliation of the world, what shall the receiving of them be, but life from the dead?" (v.15.)

Le Salut par les Juifs, which may be regarded as a paraphrase of this chapter of St Paul's, takes note from the very first line, that the Blood shed on the Cross for the Redemption of the human race, just as that which is shed every day, invisibly, in the Cup of the Sacrament at the Altar, is naturally and supernaturally Jewish blood, - that vast river of Hebrew Blood whose source is in Abraham and whose estuary is in the Five Wounds of the Christ.

And that is all there is to it. There is nothing more to know. Will the Jewish world at long last discover this book which magnifies it beyond all hope, and which cost it nothing at all?

19th November 1905

Octave of the Consecration of the Churches.
(Octave de la Dedicace des Eglises.)

LÉON BLOY

TO RAISSA MARITAIN

I DEDICATE THESE PAGES,

WRITTEN TO THE CATHOLIC GLORY

OF THE GOD

OF ABRAHAM,

ISAAC

AND JACOB.

DE PROFUNDIS

From the depths of the Abyss cries Jesus to His Father, and this cry wakens in the inmost bowels of the caverns - infinitely beneath what can be conceived by the Angels and unspeakably lower than all forebodings and all mysteries of Death - the stifled, far-off ghostly groan of the Dove of the Paraclete, which re-echoes the terrible DE PROFUNDIS.

And all the bleatings of the Lamb vibrate this-wise in the fearful Pit, without it being possible to imagine a single complaint panted out by the Son of Man which does not resound IDENTICALLY in the impossible places of exile where the Comforter makes His humble abode.

1.

SALUS EX JUDAEIS EST. Salvation is of the Jews! (1)

I have wasted several precious hours of my life, like so many other poor devils, reading M. Drumont's anti-Jewish lucubrations; and I do not remember that he ever quoted these simple yet striking words of our Lord Jesus Christ, reported by St John in the fourth chapter of his Gospel.

If this copious journalist ever deigned to look up the sacred Texts, and took the trouble to prove, to my confusion, that this important precept is mentioned in such and such of the voluminous pamphlets with which he regularly overpowers Christian folks - then

(1) Salus EX Judaeis, quia Salus A Judaeis. Reply given to quite a minor doctor, who contested my translation.

it must be admitted that this homage to the sacred Book is so wondrously inarticulate and prudently vague, that it is almost impossible to trace it, and altogether impossible to be struck by it.

But mind you, it does stand for something, this testimony of the Son of God!

I am well aware that St Augustine has terribly weakened its reach in his somewhat poor exegesis of the "two walls" which you can consult if you care, in the fifteenth treatise of this venerable Doctor's celebrated commentary.

But that was in the fifth century. From the time of Jerusalem's disastrous catastrophe Israel's Reprobation had started. The human species, half conquered already by the successors of Peter, had incurably steeled its heart and become hardened for all time against Christ's abhorred executioners.

The terrifying fire of the first Persecutions had burnt itself out at last and the great harvests of Martyrs' blood had been achieved.

The teaching of the Supernatural fell to the theologians, to the expositors, to the ready-witted philosophers and the troublesome statement of one who was called the Son of Thunder would be respectfully laid aside without any danger of scandal or of blank astonishment at a Church all rosy and still mewling in its cradle.

But you can't get away from this statement. Whatever you say it is an abiding reality in all its mysterious strength, resembling some very dark gem of disturbing sheen, made all the more ^{superlatively} valuable by the shameless neglect it has suffered on the part of the stewards or the superintendents of the Faith.

Salvation is of the Jews! A disturbing passage which separates us by a thousand miles from M. Drumont! God forbid that I should declare war upon this exultant wretch. It would be far too unequal a struggle!

The pamphleteer of France Juive can boast of having struck oil. Speculating with cunning and the sang-froid of a clever commander that the philosopher's stone of wordly success consists in giving to human stomachs the swill they dote upon, he invented against the Jews with noisy persistence, the charge of making their dirty dollars at our expense.

This was his infallible secret of quelling the whole business, of burying it all up and of cocking his conceited self into the bargain.

To tell the next passer-by, supposing he were the shabbiest newcomer to the retting vat of the desperate - "Those treacherous Hebrews who splash you with mud emptying every penny from your pockets. Come, get your own back, Egyptian! Take the skin off them, if you have got the 'guts', and chase them into the Red Sea".

Ah! cry aloud this sort of thing all the time and all over the place! bellow it forth with no truce in books and journals; fight a duel now and again so that it may the more nobly resound beyond the mountains and the streams! But, whatever you do, never speak of anything else! There, then, you have the recipe and the deep secret, the medium and the retentum of the ballistics of the mighty success he is achieving. For who on earth could resist that?.

Let us add that this great man lays claim to be a good

Catholic. Now, every one knows the sublime disinterestedness of Catholics today; their unbreakable scorn for speculation or financial manoeuvring and the superior detachment which they manifest. I have written books, myself, with a view to expressing the almost painful admiration with which those students of divine charity fill me and I am quite conscious that it would have been impossible to stop be from doing so.

Thus it is quite easy to imagine the impetuosity of their zeal, when the mischievous hands of Antisemitism came and tickled the propensity for Righteousness that was in them. It can even be said, when that happened, that the scales fell from a great number of eyes and the magnanimous Drumont appeared as an apostle for the luke-warm, who never realised that religion was so profitable a concern.

III.

One or two profane individuals, it is true did demand what essential victory, morally - or even practically - lay in the undeniable fact of having undertaken to substitute for the famous Golden Calf a pig of the same metal, and what precious advantage Catholicism was going to draw from these recriminations of exchanges in the money-system.

For after all M. Drumont was entering Babylon like a hero after having discomfitted all the Semitic nations; and the admiring crew around this conqueror sniffed on him the dust of holy King Midas, mingled with the unguents and spices with

which the carcasses of mortal gods are customarily bedizened.

Speaking less lyrically this fellow was going ahead steadily, the bulky reprints were multiplying and the author's rights being collected with a Rothschildian accuracy. A whole jealous mob of writers were induced to slaver with cupidity - writers that is to say, of the same calibre who had not had this lucrative idea, but who resolved forthwith to throw themselves into the same exploits.

All the livid onion-eating Christians of Upper and Lower Egypt understood admirably that a war against the Jews would be - in the long run - an excellent dodge for covering up many a bankruptcy or reviving many a business that had got into a bad way.

Even priests without number - some of them, indeed, open servants of God - have been seen getting excited over the hope of an imminent mêlée where the blood of Israel would be spilled enough to glut millions of dogs; so long that is to say, as the Good Shepherd's genuine sheep were able to bless their God and do a bit of browsing among the cingfoils and golden clover in the longed-for pastures of the Promised Land.

The enthusiasm of the movement had taken such a sudden grip and so prodigious had been the impulse that, even today, not one of them seems to have taken it into his head really to understand whether there would not be some serious danger for a sacerdotal heart to pray in such a manner for the extermination of a people whom the Roman Apostolic Church has protected for

nineteen centuries. Do not the most painful pages of her Liturgy speak to God on Good Friday in their favour? And whence have sprung ~~the~~ Patriarchs, the Prophets, the Evangelists, the Apostles, the faithful Friends and all the first Martyrs, without daring to speak of the Virgin-Mother and our Saviour Himself, who was the Lion of Judah, the natural JEW per excellence - an unspeakable Jew! ? Without a doubt this Jew had put in a whole eternity preliminary to the passionate yearning to spring from this lineage.

But - presto! Must we not follow to the end this greedy mountebank, organiser and preacher of the crusade for the catch-penny, who does not stop preachifying for exorbitant returns to the small number of the elect of the Almighty's Strong-box? And could any individual quote a single Catholic protest when the frightful picture of this sacriligious Buffoon was displayed on our flinching walls, in the armour of the knight of the Holy Sepulchre trampling under his feet...MOSES!!!!?

Ah! that sums up the whole business!

IV.

Well; let us say no more about that.

But, let me repeat that it does not enter into my thinking nor yet into my subject to put any particular stress upon this fellow, whose triumph might have been still greater but for the disconcerting ridicule which the pride of this upstart pawn calls forth. Moreover, that same pride has just been struck a heavy blow by a harsh sentence at the court of assizes (1)

(1) Le Salut par les Juifs was written in 1892.

Yet why not mention him just at the moment when we are taking up this incomparable question of Israel, which he stupidly boasts to have brought down to the cerebral level of the most imbecile of the bourgeois?.

There should be little suspicion that I entertain any affection for the present-day descendants of this famous race. Here, to begin with, is what I wrote six years ago in a passionate book which was forcibly stifled in every imaginable way by public hostility.

"The Middle Ages", I had said, speaking of the Jews, "had the good sense to segregate them in reserve kennels and force on them a distinctive garb allowing every one a chance of giving them a wide berth. When it was absolutely necessary to do business with these vile creatures, it was done on the sly, as though it were a crime, and folks had to get themselves cleaned up, to the best of their ability, immediately after. The disgrace and danger of such contacts were the Christian antidote to the plague of their existence since God was anxious to perpetuate these vermin forever.

"Today, when Christianity seems to be gasping badly under the heel of its own faithful and the Church has lost all esteem, people get madly riled at the spectacle of the Jews as top-dogs of the community. And the very ones who violently gainsay the Apostolic tradition are the first to marvel at the business. Disinfectant is forbidden, and then there are complaints when the bugs come along. Such is the lunacy characteristic of modern times." (1)

(1) Léon Bloy: Le Désespéré: p.201. Édition Soirat, the only one recommended by the author.

I don't see that I am ~~entitled~~ to alter a quarter of a line of this gracious page. More than ever it is clear to me that Christian society is contaminated with a disgusting breed, and it is terrible to know that it is to last for all times by the will of God.

From the moral and physical point of view, the modern Yiddish-speaking Jew seems to be the meeting-point of all the horrors of the world.

V.

Finding myself at Hamburg last year, I was curious, like most ordinary travellers to get a sight of the Jewish market. The staggering vileness of this emporium of a world's filthy jumble is almost past all mention. It seemed to me that everything which can nauseate a person from living at all was the lucrative object of these dirty hawkers whose obsequious yelling clung to and fastened upon me with a burr-like tenacity, inflicting itself upon my person like the fantastic discomfort of a species of gluey flagellation.

And all these lucre-loving servile faces had the same awesome stamp which so clearly indicates Contempt, divine Satiety, irrevocable Separation from all other mortals - a stamp which made them so profoundly identical in any part of the globe where they happen to be found.

For it is a remarkable law that this anathematised people have only been able to take over a collective reprobation at the fantastic price of the eventual promotion to leadership (protagonisma) of the totality of individuals. The rejected

race has never been able to produce any kind of Caesar.

That is why I repudiate the ingenious but I daresay little known tradition, which makes the Roman people the Hebrew's ancestors, and replaces Aeneas' companions by a colony of Benjamites - explaining the She-wolf of the Twin founders by the dying Israel's inscrutable prediction: "Benjamin LUPUS rapax, mane comedet praedam et vespere dividet spolia." (Benjamin shall ravine as a wolf: in the morning he shall devour the prey and at night he shall divide the spoil.) (1)

The filthy jumble-dealers of Hamburg were, in very truth, of that homogeneous family of greedy conspirators like the type you get among all the squalid devils of Judaic identity such as you see swarming along the Danube, in Poland, in Russia, in Germany, in Holland, in France as well and in the whole of northern Africa, where the Arabs at times make a vile putty out of them, excellent for rubbing down mangy sheep.

Yet, let me confess: where my horrified repugnance got beyond all speculation and all legitimate calculation was at the apparition of the Three Ancients.

VI.

I name them the Three Ancients because I know no other way of designating them. There may, perhaps, be fifty in this privileged town, which obviously is none the prouder because of them. For all that, I had only three in front of my eyes and that was enough to let the most unwonted dragons show up before me.

All that bore the least vestige of modernity vanished away from me at once, and the lower-ranking fashionable Jews who used to

(1) Genesis 49.27. named like slaughter-houses

elbow me as they swarmed like slaughter-house gnats, ceased to exist. They had no more right in the matter at all, being absolutely out of the picture beside those Ancients.

For the shamelessness of the modern Jew which I used to regard as full-orbed, irreproachable and savoury - as much as an exilir of malediction could be - had no longer the slightest relish, and looked like nobility itself in comparison to this nightmare of infamy which had been brought to light.

The sight of these three phantoms released such an unparalleled species of horror that, to interpret it symbolically, a blasphemous condition of soul would literally have to be admitted.

Let us imagine, if at all possible, the Three Patriarchs of Holy Writ: Abraham, Isaac and Jacob whose names, shrouded in impenetrable mystery, form the Delta, the equilateral Triangle, where slumbers within the curtains of the thunderbolt, the inaccessible Tetragramme!

Let us picture them - I scarcely dare pen it! - those three august figures, more than human by a long chalk, from whose loins all the People of God and the Word of God, Himself, have sprung. Let us, for the moment, grant the supposition that they are still alive, having by a very special miracle, survived the progeny of those who sacrificed their great crucified Child. Let us further suppose that the three Patriarchs have taken upon themselves - God knows in view of what unrevealable redemption! - a destitution that is absolute, an ordure that is nameless, a moral depravity that is infinite, a treasure of the world's execrations that is

inexhaustible, as well as the contemptuous hooting of a whole world which makes the echoing chasms resound with malicious slander - and the everlasting amazement of the Seraphim or the Thrones at the sight of them dragging themselves in this unseemly manner through all the mire of the centuries!..

VII.

Yes, indeed, in the spirit of this vision which will doubtless appear madness, the three hideous beings were realising to perfection the archtype and the primordial phenomenon of the indelible Race which has continued to achieve for two thousand years the unexampled miracle of surviving all those who would annihilate it, and of making one everlasting appeal to all the hells for the annulment of its sentence.

But, good Lord! What fearful ancestors!

In all truth they were of too classical a stamp not to show themselves as detestable as they were sublime. From Shakespeare's time until Balzac there has been a terrific sifting out of the ancient Hebrew who, misshapen and niggardly, would ferret about for gold in the gutter among the teeming growths of humanity, falling down before it in short, as though it were a sun of affliction and a Paraclete of love, co-equal and co-eternal with his solitary Jehovah.

In a threefold capacity, therefore, do the Jews realise this monster in their identical persons, adding to the vulgar horror of this ancient myth the measureless dread of their triune veridical presence...

Abraham, Isaac, Jacob gone down to the depths of this nefarious Limbo!... Even so. For my imagination, dismantled by horror, discerns instinctively the divine Title-deeds that are in them.

Well, really, let us give up the effort to depict them, leaving that third labour of Alcides to the documenting clerks of decaying carrion and the cosmographers of worm-induced fermentation.

All the same I shall have a long memory for those debauched incomparables whom I am at this moment seeing in their stinking coarse-linen gabardines, bending down, foreheads touching, over the mouth of a vile sack that would have given the stars the horrors, in which were accumulated, for the exportation of typhus germs, the unmentionable articles of some arch-semitic business-deal.

I do, indeed, owe them the tribute of this well-nigh affectionate memorandum for having evoked in my mind the most grandilquent ideas which can penetrate the abode of a mortal mind devoid of all grandeur.

I shall be speaking about that in a moment ~~with~~ as much clarity as I can command.

Meantime, let me affirm with all the strength of my soul that a synthesis of the Jewish question is sheer absurdity, apart from

assuming, in the first place, the so-called prejudice of regarding Jacob as essentially a branch broken off, relegated to the most abject decrepitude - without any hope of compromise or going back, as long as his "Messiah" does not descend upon the earth in a blaze of glory.

VIII

Until that day, absolute justice from on high as well as from below will continue to make the imperious demand that Jacob must be execrated as an object of loathing. Strictly speaking, I am well aware that the Israelites may be called our "brothers" - but only, I am afraid, in the way that plants or animals, so named by the seraphic St Francis, claim the title - for St Francis, you must remember, never made a mistake. But to have an affection for them as brothers is a proposition revolting to human nature. That would be the most miraculous display of transcendent holiness or the idle dream of an insensate religiosity.

Nothing less than the authority of one of the Twelve is needed to guarantee that "Elias was a fellow-creature along with the rest of us", for this particular prophet, who had Fire as his ministering angel, appears to have been much more than mere man: but the Jews who have been or still are to be born since that first Good Friday Grand Mass, can never be fellow-creatures of the rest of us.

Their careworn flesh, stubbornly averse to any intermingling over

such a vast number of centuries, gives us superabundant notification of the stupendous position they occupy as the uniquely exceptional within humanity.

Yet nothing can gainsay the fact that this is the stock from which sprang our Lord Jesus Christ. It is, therefore, specially consecrated and immortal in its inflexibility. Of course it was frightfully detrunked after that solemn "Crucifigatur", but its foundation was unimpaired with its roots inextricably entangled ~~within~~ the living depths of the divine Will.

That is why they are all imperturbably identical and so thoroughly re-absorbed in the outward persons of those shocking ancients. The senile ~~stench~~ exuding from the black rags doesn't make any difference at all when we examine this question. For it is because I was observing - and that minutely - all the contemporary millionaires, male or female, who constitute the pride of our perfumed synagogues, in the three carcasses mentioned above, that they exercised such an indelible impression upon me.

The history of the Jews dams the history of the human race in much the same way as a dyke dams a river - in order to raise the level.

Athwart that current they are adamant for all time and all that can be done is to clear the obstacle with as little commotion as may be, knowing there is no possible hope of sweeping it away.

For an expedient like that has been tried often enough in all conscience, but there is no going back on sixty generations of experience. Conquerors whom nothing daunted took over the

job of wiping them out. Multitudes who could never get over the Affront levelled at the living God persistently dashed to be in at their kill. The Vine as symbol of the Testament of Redemption was pruned with tireless devotion from such noxious parasites. All the same, this people, scattered over a score of different peoples, under the protection of several millions of Christian princes, accomplished throughout the centuries its iron destiny - a destiny which was summed up in simply refusing to die out, in preserving always and everywhere in the squalls or in the cyclones, the handful of exquisite dirt mentioned in the Holy Book, which it believed to be the divine Fire. (1)

That stiff-necked and reprobate Race which Moses found so obstinately disobedient has worn out the fury of men as an anvil of stubborn metal wears out the last hammer. Chivalry's sword has been dented on it and the finely tempered blade of the Mussulman chief has been shattered, to say nothing of the cudgel of the mob.

It has therefore been amply proved that there is nothing to be done in the matter; and in view of what God is content to put up with, surely it is most fitting for religious souls to ask themselves candidly without any presumption or foolish display of feeling - confronted as they are with the Inscrutable - whether some infinitely adorable mystery is not, after all, concealed underneath this species of unparalleled ignominy perpetrated on an Orphan People, which, though condemned in all the assizes of Hope, will not perhaps, on the day appointed, lack the right of appeal.

(1) 11 Maccabees CH.1.

IX.

Patience, now, and listen to this, all you poor folk for whom Jesus wanted to suffer.

If some enthusiast for my prose should one day be raised up, the wretch would probably come across by providential aid the following lines, which are as completely unknown, I imagine, as the page quoted above:

"A great deal has been written about money. The politicians, the economists, the moralists, the psychologists and the mystagogues have exhausted themselves on the subject. But I have not noticed that any of them has ever expressed the feeling of mystery peculiar to this astonishing word.

"Biblical exegesis has revealed this remarkable peculiarity that in the sacred Books the word MONEY is the synonym and figure of the living word of God. From this is derived the consequence that the Jews as ancient depositaries of the Word which they finished by crucifying when it became Flesh of Man, have retained the shadow of it, in their condition after the Fall, so that they might accomplish their destiny without wandering about aimlessly with no sense of vocation on the face of the earth.

"It certainly is by virtue of some divine decree that they should possess, no matter by what means, the greatest part of the goods of this world. Great joy may they have with it! But what do they do with it all?" (1)

What do they do with money? I am going to tell you about that. They crucify it.

(1) Léon Bloy: Christophe Colomb devant les Taureaux p.108.

You must excuse me for this expression. I know its usage is rather **uncommon**. But it is not more extravagant, when you have a good look at it, than this other expression: "Eating money". The genuine monstrosity of that phrase, once unfathomed, would make innumerable human beings who make use of it, die with fright.

I have just said exactly what I was meaning to say. They crucify it, because that is the Jewish fashion of exterminating what is divine.

The symbols and the parables of the Holy Book exist for all time: the Church, infallible as it is, having no more effaced the symbolical figures than it has dismissed the prophecies. Nothing less than eternity itself can take the measure of these: and the Jews, having strangled the Word made flesh, after having very jealously preserved it for so long as it did not enlighten their carnal eyes, espoused, unknown to themselves, the dreadful penance of being fixed for all time in their sacrilege and of continuing passionately to perpetrate upon the indestructible Symbol what they had accomplished on the suffering flesh of the true God.

Crucifying money? What on earth is that? It is hoisting it upon the gallows like a thief; raising it aloft; putting it on high; taking it out of reach of the Poor - though it is nothing but the poor's 'daily bread'!...

The Word, the Flesh, the Money, the Poor...Analogous ideas, consubstantial words which designate, in common, Our Lord Jesus Christ in the language which the Holy Spirit has spoken.

For as soon as you touch one or other of these dreadful Images which are so numerous, they all run together at once and roar from all

sides like rushing waterfalls leaping towards a solitary central abyss.

"It is I!" cries each of them.

"It is I, Money, who am the Word of God, the Saviour of the World! It is I who am the Way, the Truth, the Life, the Father of the future century!"...

"It is I, the Word, who am Money, the Resurrection, the mighty God, the goodly Vine, the living Bread, the Corner-stone!"...

"It is I, the Flesh, the weak Flesh, who am yet the joy of the Angels, the Purity of the Virgins, the Lamb of the dying and the good Shepherd of the dead!"...

And it is "I" all the time; I, the Poor, the Father of the poor, who am the treasure of the faithful, a treasure noxious in the extreme, it is true, yet at the same time, King of the Patriarchs and Strength of the Martyrs! It is indeed I who am the Slave, the Spat-upon, the Humiliated, the Leper, the horrible Beggar whom all the prophets have mentioned... and the Creator of the Milky Way and the nebulae into the bargain!

But who in the world could have thoughts to match such mighty themes?

X.

Ah! You remember when Jesus called out to His Father: "Forgive them, for they know not what they do!" Nobody surely would wish that a prayer like that uttered by a dying man like that ought not to have been granted.

That would be a most disconcerting supposition and imply a most audacious blasphemy. Such a rebuff administered to a death-pang must go infinitely beyond what can either be conceived or hinted at by men or by heavenly Spirits.

As then it is the nature of divine cries to break forth everywhere at once, this present one ought to have pierced the very crust of the globe and reverberated vigorously among earth's gloomy corridors where lie deposited those dangerous minerals which vanquished Angels scrupulously concealed in their utter despair.

These cursed and holy pieces of Silver, though incapable of any feeling, were employed by God to get Himself bartered like a head of cattle. Thereafter they were invested for the terror of the human race with a mysterious and profoundly symbolic survival potency and committed to the trusteeship of the children of Jacob.

Cursed by a blindness beyond all wretchedness and yet incapable of rousing any pity, the palest of metals became, in the eyes of a people condemned to endure for all time, the substitute for the livid God Who expired between two thieves.

Accordingly, I regard this to be the far-from-innocent infancy of a mercantile emulation which would incriminate the whole melancholy pack for its felony and its limitless greed. But, all the same, it would be far more to the point if we made an effort and caught a glimpse, though it were only in a ray of light athwart the pall of fetid smoke forever overhanging the battle-front, of the prodigious spectacle of a Jewish pogrom which never reaches an end.

I was saying only a moment ago that the Jews have been tortured without mercy, beaten up and caged between iron bars throughout the centuries, in every empire in the world - and all to no purpose. They are pushed by God, invincibly and supernaturally pushed into carrying to fruition all the ghastly abominations needed to warrant them with a sanction for their dishonourable profession as instruments of Redemption!

In these days the same carnage is being started all over again with the same lack of success, for they positively cannot prevent themselves from being the kind of people they are. And necessity demands - to say the least of it - the advent of Elias and the un-nailing of the Hands and the Feet of the Christ in order that their pardon should be obtained.

XI

Sympathy for the Jews is a sure mark of being below the pale, there is no getting away from that. Anyone who is not instinctively disgusted at the Synagogue is unworthy of a dog's respect. And that is just a plain, sober statement like an axiom of rectilinear geometry without any irony or bitterness about it.

It doesn't bother me in the very slightest what is the theologians' or the economists' grouse about the Jews. All I am concerned about is that they have committed the supreme Crime, in comparison with which every other crime is a virtue. I mean that Sin with neither name nor measure which has reference to the divine Integrity. There would have been no possible redress

for it had not that mad prayer of Jesus, dizzy with harrowing torments upon His distracting Cross, intervened.

Did they not abominate the POOR MAN with an infinite abomination? They abominated Him to such a degree that, to make a scandal of Him and torture Him at their convenience, they had to congregate from all quarters and call to their assistance the energy of the subterranean fire of hereditary resentments against a Lord of Sabaoth Who, in former times had punished their transgressions so terribly.

With the patience of several millions of ants bent on building themselves a mountain, they accumulated in advance throughout many generations the most ferocious facts of evidence culled from the implacable Book, where the Spirit of the God of Israel had inscribed His wrath. And all that they levelled against the Man who was Unique and voluntarily disarmed.

Throwing back at Him the excessive threat of their ancient texts, they seemed to say to Him: "Thy Father has chastened us with whips, but we are going to scourge Thee with scorpions." (1)
"We will tear Thy flesh with the thorns of the wilderness and with briars." (2)

The clamour of the malignantly possessed populace which preceded the Sentence and which accompanied, like a continuous bass, a Punishment of unparalleled magnitude, was assuredly the fullest manifestation of human horror for Poverty.

This supernatural delirium will never be surpassed, and when

(1) 11 Chron. 10.11.
(2) Judges 8.7.

the demented mob yells and growls with joy over the corpses of the "Two Witnesses" whose immolation the Apocalypse has prophesied - even that will not be any more horrifying.

There is no necessity to have made any thorough-going exegetical research to realise that Jesus Christ was, in effect, the genuine Poor Man. Such He was designated in every page of the Old or the New Testament. Unique among the poorest, He was unfathomably below any of your beastly Jobs, the one solitary diamond and the Oriental jewel of poverty magnificent. He was, in short, that Poverty proclaimed by the redoubtable Seers who were stoned to death by the populace.

A saint has said that the Christ possessed the "three poverties" as His companions. He was poor in respect of worldly goods, poor in respect of friends and poor in respect of Himself. Such was His character to the ~~in~~thermost depths of the yawning chasm.

Since he was God and since He had only consented to come at all in order to prove that He was a God Who manifests Himself as genuinely poor, He did so amidst the radiating glory and infinite plenitude of His divine Attributes.

There could, of course, never be any other Victim save the Poor Man, and the absolutely incomprehensible excesses of this Passion, forever present and everlastingly aflame, are inexplicable to people who do not know what Poverty is. Atheism itself cannot stifle its fear of it. It is "the election into the furnace of poverty", as Isaiah put it, and he was the prophet of future events who was sawn between two stakes.

XII.

The Jews hold the ineffaceable honour of having translated, for mankind's use, hatred for the Poor Man into a kind of torment whose eloquence has supplanted all known horrors.

Such was their knowledge of the enormity of their task that they invented the Coronation of thorns in order to prove that it should never henceforth be disputed that it was at least a genuine King of abject wretchedness over whom they really had had the power to have the upper hand.

This was a Ceremony hotherto unparalleled and the scholars of the ancient Temple were not to be kept in ignorance of its profound meaning. Thorns are an essential ingredient of supreme malediction, since that initial Disaster; and "the harvest of thorns in place of a harvest of wheat" is a proverb outstandingly Hebraic in character.

These words doubtless bring to mind the cry of the Lamentator: "Humble yourselves and sit down on the ground, O deplorable flock of the Lord, for the crown of your glory has fallen from your head"; and also, perhaps, the petals of living blood which spurted from Christ's forehead gave them furiously to think of the Coronemus ROSIS (Let us crown ourselves WITH ROSES) of the blasphematory Canticle of Wisdom. (2)

But were these doctors, so replete with irony and cruelty, aware that this dreadful Coronation would rule over them for ever and oppress them more hardly than Pharoah, since that Crown was placed on the dying head of One Who could have no other successor

(1) Jeremiah 13.18.

(2) Wisdom of Solomon 2.8.

than that loathesome silver whose wretched slaves they became after His death?

For this is a most disturbing mystery. Jesus' death essentially does separate Money from the Poor. It is the symbol of those who are prefigured in the same way as, in ordinary deceases, the body is separated from the soul.

The Church universal, born as it is of divine Blood, had the Poor Man for her portion, and the Jews, entrenched in the impregnable fortress of an obstinate despair, took charge of Money - that ghastly Silver, scratched with their sacrilegious thorns and disgraced by their spittle. - In much the same way they might have kept the corpse of a God which was subject to corruption, exposed and unburied so that the universe might be contaminated.

XIII.

But who can get excited over these venerable Images, or undergo the labour of trying to understand them - although they are the very images upon which the world has lived? A work such as the present scarcely suffers at all if they are put on one side. Moreover, how can you get away from the discouraging conviction that you will not be understood?

At times they have such a contradictory behaviour - those vocables - whether they be familiar or unfamiliar. Their literal meaning is so diverse and their spiritual significance so unchangeable. Each and all of them have their own way of intimating infinite Reality, and resemble multi-coloured veils in front of a common Tabernacle!

We are tempted to believe them incoherent or capricious because

one moment they appear locked in deadly combat and next moment locked in loving embrace. When we look upon them fixedly, they interpenetrate suddenly and coalesce in a single front to multiply all over again as soon as we strive to catch them.

And when, in our utter fatigue, we turn away from them to contemplate empty shadows in the magnetic mirrors of the universe, they make their appearance insidiously like very subtle potencies which will not let us go, entangling the mind with their unobtrusive yet insistent movements.

It is idle to tell us that they are the several waves of an identical Ocean and that it is not their business to analyse a Unity that is essentially absolute, for their perpetual ebb and flow and the apparent conflict of their colours hopelessly disconcert the most careful effort at focusing attention.

We must simply resign ourselves to acquiring intermittent flashes of illumination in the knowledge that Jesus, Who came expressly to "fulfil" all things spoke only in parables and similitudes.

The interpretation of sacred Texts was formerly considered the most glorious effort of the human mind, since according to infallible Solomon's testimony "it is the glory of God to conceal His word."(1)

Those were the days when we had our masters and the tranquil reign of elevating speculations; but now is the hour for our hirelings and the conclusive victory of cheap, new-fangled oddities.

So it is quite superfluous to hope for even a little attention and I would carefully avoid asking for any were I not aware that

(1) Proverbs 25.2.

people are dying of hunger in the Shepherd's stalls, and that a great number of voices are already clamouring for the key of the age to come, for which the needy suppose that Providence has reserved the refreshment of all spirits.

I am sorry I cannot put myself forward to my ambitious contemporaries as an authentic revealer. The minding of mysteries is not my concern and the custody of Future Events has certainly not come my way. Besides, prophets now-a-days are so completely lacking in miracles that it appears impossible to discern who they are.

But, if it is true that such prophets are in demand as a natural consequence of that aspect of the faith which holds that they are to come some day, I would like to know why they are never sought among the only people from whom came forth all the recording secretaries of the commandments of God.

XIV.

I am well aware that there is a story of the fig-tree which was cursed for having been found without any fruit when Jesus was feeling hungry. But the truth is that "it was not yet the time for the figs", as the Gospel points out.

It even says that there is no need for entire despair provided you dig round about the tree and put in some "dung".(1) Have a little patience and there will always be time to pull it down if it still persists in not producing fruit.

This poor fig-tree which had nothing to give to the poor Christ because the time for its figs had not yet come interests me rather strongly. For it is the indisputable symbol of the Jewish

(1) Luke 13.8.

people and gives sovereign expression to the success it has achieved.

Still, ought not the fig-tree to have given fruit of some kind to a Redeemer Who had cursed it in His impatience pending that deluge of impurities which was to bring an exuberance of subsequent fecundity? And may we not surmise that the unfathomable Traitor who sums up so well the bifid Race hanged himself on just this tree of desperation under whose branches all good Hebrews of tradition have confidently continued to sit down?

Reckoning from that terrible first-fruit, it must be an astounding feat for the heavenly Spirits to piece together the destiny of the Jews, with all their ancient promises of glorious dominion and blessedness "in aeternum" (to all eternity) of which their Sacred Books are so full.

At the personal appearance of the Poor Man Who had been quite unexpected for two thousand years, any spirituality about them vanished and their nature, carnally corrupt through idolatrous money-changing, stands exposed.

Judas is the type of this people, their prototype and their supertype. If you like, he is the approved pattern for the shameful, never-ending conjunctions of their greed at the point where you might suppose they all came to the surface just as did the intestines from the ruptured bowels of this broker who made a deal on his own God.

This fellow was a common pickpocket - a kleptēs, according to the Greek, says our gentle evangelist St. John and he it was who "kept the purse." He is still keeping a grip of it more than ever, and

that is the sole reason which furnishes us with the bountiful spectacle of the journalistic fits of spleen perpetrated by that brainless despiser of Shem.

The Middle Ages, which had practically no conception of pocket-money and whose heart was overwhelmed with love, never went beyond thirty pieces of silver and even that appeared to it as a fabulous sum. It would doubtless have preferred the sum to have been less considerable so that the disgrace of its God might have played first-cousin to the humiliation of any of the laughing-stocks who ask alms in His Name.

Christians of that time understood pretty well that in the tumultuous drama of Good Friday, there were only two personages - the Jew and the Poor Man. Their simple souls were equally devoted to sorrowful adoration and boundless horror - everything else being left to the clever doctors who spoke Latin.

I no longer know exactly where I read the rather naive adventure of that ancient knight seated in his capacity as high dignitary in a synod assembled for the ecclesiastical trial of a turbulent rabbi, who had put into circulation certain damnable criticisms against the Virgin Mary.

After a long dispute in which the bold member of the circumcised had readily confounded the ignorant theologians put up against him, and just when that dubious silence had set in which precedes the deliverance of a sentence devoid of mercy - the old man clad in armour, who till then had made no living movement, got down slowly from the stall of oak-timber, where he had given the impression of being sound asleep, and going up to the Talmudian:

"Jew" said he, "thou hast well spoken, but there is still an argument which thou has not bargained for and which will leave thee with no reply."

At these words he unhitched his huge Ptolemaic sword - or it may have come from Antioch - and split him in two like a Saracen felon from the head to the feet.

Anecdotes like these are valuable for exasperating imbeciles and refreshing the imagination of good Christians.

XV.

Ah, Middle Ages, humble yet great! - epoch most dear to all those pestered by the tumults of Disobedience, who live within the deep privacy of their own souls!

The last three centuries have done much to erase the period altogether or to bring it into disrepute, changing with many a tainting opium the glorious lyrical faculties of the ancient Occident. There even exists a new current of critical and documentary historians, whose permanent concern is just this odious task.

But my belief is that the Thousand years of tears, of bloody escapades and ecstasies will continue to run athwart the fingers of the pedants as long as the human heart has not ceased to beat. It is strangely significant that the Jews are, in sum, the most faithful witnesses and the most authentic vindicators of those candid Middle Ages, which used to hate them for the love of God, and which, so often, would have exterminated them altogether.

At the beginning of the book I drew attention to those insalubrious yet sublime individuals whom I gazed upon at Hamburg - animals so well preserved in their dung, so intact, so prodigiously immaculate from all that was not the vermin of ancestors or relatives that I had the horror of feeling myself in the presence of the same breed which had made folks born under Philip Augustus or Frederick Barbasossa turn sick, scattered as they were under the earth or in the furrows of the skies for so many generations that they would have died at the very remembrance of Christ's death.

I caught a glimpse of the vast grandeur of those far-off times when the Church Militant, shod with the Immaculate Conception, planted her feet on the necks of kings and daunted the universe. But for all that her strength was bruised against the scum of a people bent on resisting her without ever dying out.

You would even have imagined that this intractable obstacle was warning the Church, in the fulness of her triumph, of the precarious position she occupied as spouse to a bleeding God whom everything had resisted.

Seeing that the Church had become wide as the sea she should, with awesome dread, have taken to herself our Lord's summary prohibition: "Hitherto shalt thou come, but no further: and here shall thy proud waves be stayed." (1)

Nevertheless, so far as the Church was concerned, war against the Jews was never anything but a badly directed effort of godly fervour and all the time the Papacy shielded them magnanimously against the fury of everybody.

(1) Job. 38.11.

XVI.

Expectans expectavi (Waiting still, I have always awaited,) sang the Christians, as they awaited the Resurrection of the dead.

Expectaveram et adhuc expectabo, (I had awaited and henceforward shall I await) was the profound correction of Israel's groanings. I had awaited and I mean still to await. Your Messiah is not my Messiah, and even should all your graves open up, I would keep on awaiting all the time.

The patient Church of Jesus silently considered those interminable suspensions in the strength of an unspeakable hope; but no Saviour could have borne the horrifying penance of them - however the basilicas and the monasteries might peal to the glory of an Infant Jew who had died in disgrace to save a world of vagrants.

The sobbing and the carolling of bells at which every Christian empire used to shudder with love made a vain endeavour to impress the obstinate soul of those orphans of Leviathan.

Creditors of an imperishable Promise which the Church reckoned already fulfilled and fortified by an everlasting Covenant signed by the Holy Spirit no less than three hundred times, the Son of Mary appeared to them scarcely the equal of that leprous king who reigned over Jerusalem "full of leprosy till the day of his death" and who was the awesome dweller of an isolation-house because of his crime of having usurped the High Priest's sons by seizing the incense-burners.(1)

(1) 11 Chron. 26

How they must have scorned the painful pageantry of Christianity - those wild tatterdemalions who still laboured under the impression that the glory of Ezekiel's God stood in need of their glory!

Ah! In vain might the Church tell them: "If a man be found selling his brother of the children of Israel, and maketh merchandise of him, then he shall be put to death." (1) All the posterity of Jacob could reply to that:

"If you believe us to be like Cain because we are wanderers and fugitives upon the earth, remember that the Lord has put a mark on that murderer so that any who find him should not kill him; (2) and see then how vain are your threats of extermination.

We have God's word of honour. He has sworn to us His eternal alliance and we refuse to let Him go back upon it. That word endures for ever and when it is fulfilled you are to become our slave.

If it be His Son Whom we have crucified, well, let that Saviour of others save Himself, since we have promised to believe Him when He comes down from His Cross."

XVII

And the Mother of the faithful, frozen with horror, continues in the imperturbable serenity of her Liturgy, the sublime Lamentations:

"How sadly does the congested City crouch in Solitude! She is made like unto a widow, the Mistress of nations: the Princess of provinces has become tributary

(1) Deut.. 24.7.
 (2) Gen.4.15.

"Sorrowfully have her eyes flowed all through the night and her tears are still on her cheeks; none of her lovers comfort her; all her friends have despised her and have become her enemies.

"Judah has undergone a change by reason of affliction and the burden of long slavery. He has dwelt among the gentiles and has found no peace; all his persecutors have hemmed him in and caught hold of him.

"Zion's highways are weeping because no one comes to the Solemn place; her gates are all destroyed, her priests are groaning, her virgins are unclean; and she herself is weighed down with bitterness.

"Foreigners have been set over her and her enemies have enriched themselves, because the Lord has complained of her, owing to the vast number of her iniquities. Her toddling children have been led into captivity before the face of him who brought tribulation upon them.

"Jerusalem, Jerusalem, return to the Lord thy God!

"And from the daughter of Zion has been taken away all her grandeur; Her princes have been made like unto rams which find no pasturage and have departed, destitute of all strength, before the face of him who purchased them.

"Jerusalem has remembered the day of her affliction and the transiency of all desirable things which were hers as a possession from days gone by before her people fell into a hostile hand with no one at all to help her. Her enemies saw her and mocked at her sabbaths.

Jerusalem has sinned grievously; that is why she has been made unstable. All those who used to glorify her have despised her because they have seen her shame, while she herself with piteous groan has turned back.

"Her ordure is upon her feet and she has no remembrance of what is in store for her. She was forced down to a frightful depth having no one to comfort her. Look, O Lord, upon my affliction, since my enemy has risen up.

"Jerusalem, Jerusalem return to the Lord thy God!

"The adversary has put his hand upon all desirable things that she used to possess; for she had looked upon nations entering into her sanctuary, when Thou hadst expressly commanded that they should not enter within Thy church.

"All her people are groaning and looking for bread; they have given away all their precious treasures in order to have the wherewithal to eat at their soul's sacred banquet.(1) Behold O Lord and see how very vile I have become.

"O all ye who pass by the highway, give heed and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow; for the Lord has despoiled me, as He said He would on the day of the unleashing of His fury.

"He has sent the fire from on high upon my bones and He has opened my understanding. He has stretched the net before my feet; He has forced me to turn back; He has left me desolate, broken with sadness all the day long.

"His hand has taken care of the yoke for mine iniquities; they have been rolled up and placed on my neck; my strength is exceedingly

(1) refection de leur ame. Refection - the meal of a religious community.

enfeebled and the Lord has abandoned me to a power from which I cannot deliver myself.(1)

"Jerusalem, Jerusalem, reform thyself, for the love of thy poor God Who pleads with thee!"

XVIII.

"Jesus will be in agony until the end of the world", wrote Pascal - the most deplorable, I believe, of the great men who have badly gone astray.

This is a thought of rare, sad beauty which the sullen Jansenist most certainly could not explain and which could only be, in his eyes, a hyperbole of devotion.

Yet it would not be at all easy to state exactly where this combination of syllables has the power of overmastering a deep heart which holds it to be more than human...

By virtue of its passionate love, the Middle Ages had understood that Jesus is always crucified, always bleeding, always dying, scoffed at by the mob and cursed by God Himself to conform to that particular text of the ancient Law: "He that is hanged on a tree is cursed by God." (2) How could the Middle Ages have helped not abhorring the Jews?

During that period the Passion was so contemporaneous, so flamingly vital, the Blood of the Christ still so warm and ruby-red, and its ears were buzzing so fiercely with the accursed Tumult!

When this demonic people addressed the Coward who was condemned to wash his homicidal hands throughout all eternity, did they not

(1) Office de Tenebres, 1^{er} nocturne du Jeudi Saint.
(2) Deut. 21.23.

howl aloud: "Let His Blood be upon us and upon our children,"? That request demanded some satisfaction. So by means of the villification of an entire people, it fulfilled the penal verse of that New Testament, no less prophetic than the Old Testament, concerning which it was said that neither a jot nor tittle will pass away as long as the sky and the earth endured.

The sufferings of Jesus were the bread and wine of the Middle Ages, a primary school for it and the lofty pinnacle of its clergy. They constituted a home for it with a hearth full of fire-brands and sparks: its couch for birth and death alike, and at times a paradise for its saints as well. Those latter could imagine nothing better than the privilege of weeping with the Mother of the Seven Wounds and the Good Thief through all eternity.

The same sufferings were - they simply had to be - the passionate theme, the ever-new poem, the re-lived catastrophe of a perpetually painful drama for a simple-minded society where the faculties of enthusiasm and loving-kindness flamed forth with a magnificence which only the furnaces of the Paraclete will one day be able to re-kindle.

The Poverty of the Lord was felt in wondrous fashion by those tender-hearted crowds, and compassion for a God so deserving of pity caused, sometimes, the death of other poor folk who freely took upon their shoulders all that they could bear of His burden, in addition to their own misfortunes.

The better to suffer with Him, they used to throng against the

picture of the broken-hearted Virgin who took her big, dead Son on her knees - as on a new cross (1) - while she drew from His Head with a pair of precious pincers the stubborn thorns which had been driven into it.

- "You are sorrowful and given to weeping, Our Lady Virgin Mary," they would say. "To whom can we compare you, and who is your equal? Your contrition is like the sea. Make me weep with you; make me bear the death of our Lord; make me live through His Passion and mirror forth His Wounds."(2)

She alone could tell them of the infinite pain of the deity whose Name was **Destitute** whom she had brought humbly into the world among the ~~beasts~~ of the field and who never had had any peace from trouble nor from sating Himself with tribulation.

XIX

And the vast desolate look with which the morning **Star** drowned all those who commiserated with Her was for them (of the Middle Ages) a response of most heart-rending sweetness.

"The Wicked Jews" - they thought they heard - "accused my divine Child of being a glutton and a drunkard (3) and I admit, it is quite true. For even from His Cross He groaned for something to be given **Him** to drink.

"You can just ask if He caught a glimpse of MY TEARS, then."

Those tears, closely related to His sacred Humanity and thereafter armed against Him with the almighty sweep of a supplication on behalf

(1) Sainte Brigitte, liv.1., chap.10.

(2) Office des Sept Douleurs

(3) Ecce homo vorax et potator vini. Matt. 11.19.

of a universe stricken with madness, are lifted up like so many waves around His solitary Cross.

Before anything had reached fruition, when all ancient prophecies had generated the seed of their dreadful harvests still to be reaped - when, after four millennia of humiliation, the Woman at last stood upright before the Tree of life, her feet on the Serpent's head and her forehead among the twelve stars - the whole wretched lineage from that first Disobedience, magnified by my Compassion, appeared in the splendour of my tears.

The Cup of infinite bitterness which Jesus prayed His Father to pass Him by when He was under the olive-trees, and which horrified His saintly Soul, inducing the Bloody Sweat and the Agony - that Cup He was compelled now to drink from Her hand whom He had chosen from the beginning to be the unblemished minister of the cruellest part of His punishment.

Since He had complained of thirst, needs must He empty the cup to the very last drop; nor was He to be allowed to yield up His spirit until all the tears of successive generations had been poured out of this veritable Cup of His Agony which was my Heart!

The Angel who had been present at his vigil had fled to heaven; His Father had just forsaken Him and that stern judgment; "Woe to him who is alone", was experienced in Him in an infinitely unparalleled manner.

His Mother herself had become like a stranger to Him, since He had deprived Himself of Her in favour of His disciple before asking a drink.

He was henceforth totally alone and face to face with Judith, like a Holophernes nailed upon the bed of His own perdition.(1)

The sun was already hiding itself to escape the horror of this silent encounter, and the dead were beginning to stir in their graves...

- "Drink, my Son," the desolate voices were saying from the recesses of my abyss, "Drink these tears of sadness and these tears of wrath. The gall was not bitter enough and the vinegar was not sour enough to quench a thirst like yours.

"Drink these tears shed by orphans, widows and exiles;

"Drink these tears shed by adulterers, parenticides and despairing wretches;

"Drink once again this potion - the three-fold ocean of the tears of Avarice, carnal Lust and Pride;

"And drink lastly these tears of money, which will henceforth be the unique patrimony in Israel. The day will come when false Christians, in sacrilegious derision, will spill them over the worm-eaten coffin of the vainglory of the dead.

"What a substantial beverage the People of God have kept for the refreshment of your second Agony! And mine is the hand which is holding it up to you, for I am the one whom you have so cruelly delegated to give you something to quench your thirst before your last breath.

"You have said: 'Blessed are those who weep,' and it is because I weep the tears of all generations that 'all generations will call me Blessed.'

(1) Epitre de la messe des Sept Douleurs.

"I have only spoken six times in the Gospel. And such was my Seventh Word, unnoticed by the Evangelist on my right and by Madeleine on my left, but the mighty cry of the Consummatum (It is finished), responded to it."

Jesus bowed His fearful Head to enable Death to make his approach...

And the veil of the temple was rent from top to bottom, like Caiaphas' dress or the Traitor's bowels - to indicate that cruel Jewry should henceforth possess naught but forsaken tabernacles.

XX.

The desolations and terrors of the Gospel were getting to such a point for those good folks of ancient times that their loathing for the Jews began to assume - from the very nature of their sensitiveness - something of the prophetic.

Not only had the Jews crucified Jesus, - What do I say? - not only did they crucify Him before their very eyes, but they refused to have Him taken down from His Cross while believing in Him.

For all the words of the sacred Text are alive.

With those deeply loving souls there can never be any question of rhetoric or empty literature when it is the Word of God we are dealing with.

Authors of books which have all gone by the board were inchoate in the limbos of matrices still to come and there would have been no little horror if any ill-advised person had supposed the Holy Spirit to have been capable of relating an anecdote or telling some incidental story, even though it were conveniently pruned for the occasion.

Nobody ever used to find in the Book one syllable which did not bear simultaneously on the past and on the future, on the Creator and on the creatures, on the abyss of the heights and on the abyss of the depths - enveloping all worlds at one time with one unique flash of light into Ecclesiastes' revolving mind which "reviewed the universes in circuitu (in circular manner), ever turning on its own rotatory action."

Besides, this was the fixed principle of a Church which cuts through any period in a way that any corrupt member may be brought into touch with this sacred Rainbow as it emerges from the thunder-storms. In other words, Scriptural Revelation is eternally present in the historical sense, and absolutely universal, in the symbolic sense.

Or we may say the divine Word is infinite, absolute and irrevocable in whatever way we look at it, and above all keeps on repeating itself in wondrous manner, for God can only speak of Himself.

Those simple souls were, therefore, "reasonably" persuaded that the Jewish Mockery recorded by the first two Evangelists is nothing less than the timely fulfilment of an event foretold by the prophetic narrative of a God Who tells the story Himself, and their instinct would warn them that the "terrestrial Reign" of the Crucified and the glorious end of His age-long Punishment would depend, in some inexpressable manner, on the good-will of those infidels.

XXI.

Now, to come to the point, it was their will which was damnable. Those cursed devils were well aware of their own power, and the abominable thing about their glee was that it deferred indefinitely that glorious Reign expected so long by the captives, by an 'eternalising' of the Victim.

The Salvation of all the peoples of the earth was, by their malice, diabolically suspended - in a figurative as well as in a literal sense - and it was the Pharisee among the Apostles, a man undoubtedly more conversant with such things than anyone, who was obviously compelled to admit that we are only saved "by hope", nothing but hope, and that we must still await Redemption, breathing the while in the piteous Spirit of the Lord with "groanings which cannot be uttered." (1)

This rabble's refusal kept immobilizing to a fearful extent, by dragged-out moments and seconds, the swift-moving episodes and all the tragic events of the Passion.

Judas, odious fellow that he was, would keep on kissing his Master in the garden all the time, and that miserable Son of the Dove, Simon Peter, would never more cease to deny Him, as he "warmed himself" in the Porch.

Spittle, Blows and Bruises have pelted down with neither interruption nor mercy amidst a hubbub of Abuses, while the unearthly din of the Five Thousand Blows administered with leaden thongs, mentioned by Tradition, have kept reverberating more horribly than ever, multiplied a thousand-fold by all the echoes of earth's Pain,

(1) Rom. 8.24,26.

like the resounding clatter of hurricanes.

Under the lofty portico of a colossal dwelling-house from which the shadows seemed to creep, gloomy Pilate would wash his hands for a thousand years and doubtless would dream of washing them for a thousand years to come in his effort to find out whether he could not obtain from some ocean or other what he had futilely sought to find from all other streams.

And before this crooked judge the unforgiveable Crown, the authentic "Burning Bush" which wreathed the Virgin's Son, would ever dig its atrocious spikes into the divine Head of the Brotherhood of executed Criminals - a Head which the work of the scourgers had left inflamed like a fire-brand.

The mighty cry of those who would kill their God rumbled louder than the obstinate roar of a cataract, aggravated by the plaintive voices of the lambs destined for the pascal sacrifice, which could be heard each moment from the side of the Temple Reservoir...(1)

And this mad Cross, displaying the nailing and un-nailing of the Christ, His unutterable death-pangs, the Seven Words He articulated, the Station of His Mother, this Dead Man between other dead men, so appalling to the sun for three whole hours; all the details, in short, of this scandalous debauch of torture, the mere presentiment of which would consume the faithful in their adoration, were pitilessly distinct and palpable, fixed for ever in time and space and paralysed into perpetual distortedness by an inexorable will.

"Descendat NUNC de cruce... Let Him come down from His cross and we will believe in Him. Destroyer of God's temple, save Thyself."

(1) Piscine probatique. The reservoir near the Temple in which priests washed the animals that were to be sacrificed.

There was no getting away from this ultimatum. Nothing was to come to an end, because nothing could come to an end, and because final events were forthwith regenerated afresh all over the place.

Men might bleed with Jesus, might be riddled with His wounds, might endure the agonies of His thirst, might be scourged abominably like His own sacred Majesty by all the riff-raff of Jerusalem, and even children yet unborn might tremble with horror in their mothers' wombs when the Hammer of Good Friday was heard.

Those were the days when tillers of the soil would be kindling their poor torches in the furrows of the earth so that this nurse for poor wretches might not be made barren by the increasing sweep of a shadow that might spread from Calvary's height like a never-ending black plume at the moment of the Last Sigh.

That was the day which witnessed the mighty Interdict when compassion and trembling ruled the heart. Migratory birds and the tawny inhabitants of the woods were astonished to see men so sorrowful, and animals tamed of their ferocity, sweated in anguish within their stalls at the sound of their keepers shedding tears.

Christians, at the spectacle of a Most High God descending so low, reproached themselves bitterly with having made Him in their likeness and were afraid to look the sky in the face...

From the Matins of that absolute Thursday until the grand alleluia of the Resurrection, the world was ghastly pale and silent, arteries all hardened, energies paralysed and "head languid and heart in woeful plight." What a boundless discipline of Penance was that! One dismal door, surrounded by pale accusing monsters was left ajar

to give access to God. The brilliant stained-glass window-panes were darkened. The goodly bells pealed no longer. Scarcely a soul had the hardihood to be born; scarcely a soul dared to die any more.

Vainly did one seek to solace the Virgin of the Swords, whose eyes, scorched with tears, resembled two dead suns. This motherly Face, which appeared to alienate all comfort, had become a volcano of terror, casting multitudes upon the ground...

"Let Him come down!" the jackals of the Synagogue continued to yell. - "Yes: but why, O Israel? Do you want to devour this new Joseph whom you have brought forth in your old age, for whom you have made such a fine "coat of many colours", (1) and whom you now see in the crossed arms of this Rachael so tense and inconsolable in her grief.

XXII.

"Let us pray for the perfidious Jews, that the Lord Our God may lift the veil from their hearts to allow even them to recognise Our Lord Jesus Christ. Almighty and Everlasting God, who dost not withhold Thy mercy even from the perfidious Jew, hearken unto the supplications which we bring before Thee on account of the blindness of this people, in that, having sensed the light of Thy truth, which is the Christ, they may be snatched from their darkness."

Such were, and such will be until the END of time, the Church's prayers for Abraham's amazing posterity. These are prayers of such absolute solemnity that they are recited publicly only once in a twelve-month, on Good Friday.

(1) Gen. 37.3.

In a moment like that no doubt, hearts of by-gone ages would stop beating and the hush of fiery passions would be something extraordinary, in the universal hope of catching the preliminary sigh of an obstinate People's conversion arising from the underground.

It was felt in a confused way, that those shameful dregs of society were, all the same, gaolers of Redemption in that Jesus was their prisoner, just as the Church was their prisoner. So, too, it was felt that their consent was required before good fortune could become widespread, and that it was for this very reason that a persistent miracle kept guard over their progeny.

In fulfilling the most inscrutable of laws they were potently anchored in their evil design of stifling the Power of the Almighty and of implacably postponing His Glory so that, in effect, both His Power and His Glory would appear useless in the face of Humanity's desperation - until that hour, so wondrously hidden, when the painful Propitiation of the Word made Flesh, would be consummated in all its members.

So far as that fugitive hour was concerned, even Jesus Himself had declared that He knew nothing about it, affirming that "no one, except the Father knew it!" (1)

But where the mystery became absolutely intolerable was at the idea that this unique moment so passionately desiderated throughout all ages by an entire creation, still had to depend, as it always had, upon these same Jews, hard-fisted creditors of the Holy Spirit that they were, who were holding the Blood of Christ up to ransom! Centuries had flowed past like water and generations living had

(1) Mark 13.32

emerged to take the place of generations which had died out. Titles or legal documents flourishing the signature written in that precious Blood and countersigned by the blood of all the Martyrs might be produced, but all in vain; for all that would meet your eyes would be the odious countenance of these usurers of the Comforter, and the splendour of God would continue to be cut off.

It was in this respect that the Jews, so hardly crushed by worshippers of the Cross, caused in their revenge so many Christian tears to run behind them. And terrible tears they were! You would have actually imagined that the Red Sea had spurted forth in pursuit of them!... Yes that is the reason why the Church had the courage to pray for them, albeit with lacerated heart.

XXIII

The Jews will only be converted when Jesus comes down from His Cross, but the truth of the matter is that Jesus cannot come down until the Jews are converted.

Such is the impossible dilemma in which the Middle Ages writhed as in the pincers of a vice. Hence they gave themselves no respite from cursing and massacring those abominable antagonists, except to drag themselves before their feet, begging them with tears in their eyes, to have pity upon a suffering God.

There exists no poem which can be compared to this mad genuflecting of all nations before a herd of dirty brutes, pleading with them in the Name of Eternal Wisdom in its death pangs;

"Quid feci tibi, aut in quo contristavi te?"

" - My people, what have I done to thee, and with what have I grieved thee? Do let me know.

"Because I have brought thee forth out of the land of Egypt, thou hast prepared a cross for thy Saviour...

"Because I have led thee forty years in the wilderness and fed thee with manna and brought thee into a very goodly land, thou hast prepared a cross for thy Saviour...

"What could I have done more unto thee than I have done? I planted thee my glorious vine, and it has become very bitter unto me, for thou hast quenched my thirst with vinegar, and thou hast pierced thy Saviour's side with a spear...

"Because of thee, I have scourged Egypt with its first-born, and thou hast delivered me to the birch!...

"I went before thee in the pillar of cloud and thou hast brought me to Pilate's Praetorium...

"I have satisfied thee with manna in the wilderness, and thou hast paid me back with blows and belaboured me with rods...

"Because of thee, I have smitten the kings of the Canaanites, and thou hast smitten my hand with a reed...

"I have given thee the sceptre royal and thou hast retaliated with a crown of thorns for my head...

"What, then, have I done? My people!... I have exalted thee with great strength and thou hast hanged me upon that gallows of a Cross..(1)

"Ah! The vain plea is always matched with the same insulting refusal.

(1) Office du Vendredi Saint. Adoration de la Croix.

"He has put His confidence in God. Let God, therefore, deliver Him now, if He holds by Him, since this Saviour of others claimed to be His Son."(1)

The very threat of heaven's collapse could not have dragged from them any other response.

XXIV.

This reprobate race was always then for Christians, at the same time an object of horror and the occasion of a mysterious fear.

To be sure, if you were a Christian, you were part and parcel of the docile flock of the Church so gentle and mighty, in whose bosom you might be assured that you would not perish; but for all that you would very well understand that the Lord had not said the last word. You would realise that the revelation He had given in parabolic and metaphorical form could only be penetrated to an inconspicuous depth.

It was at that very point that you would sense a something that could not be explained. The Church herself had not got the hang of it. This might very well turn out to be something of infinitely awe-inspiring moment.

If that were not the case, why these passionate outbursts and never-ending appeals?

If anyone had had the hardihood or audacity to venture to the very edge of the abyss and lean over the fearful gully of undivulged secrets, it would have been to die of vertigo at the mere thought that Israel, so "mighty against God" and scornful of so many of Christ's lessons, was, nevertheless, distinctively unique in its position.

(1) Matt. 27.43 "He trusted in God; let him deliver him now, if he will have him: for he said, I am the Son of God."

Perhaps it was by virtue of having the veritable right and staggering prerogative of panting forth - the fifth demand of the Pater noster. "Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors."

What debts? What debtors?

Since the sons of Jacob look upon the poor man as a creditor, - the Poor Man be it said is the Son of God - should they not in their turn, in a yet more mysterious sense, be creditors of this prodigal Holy Spirit? For it was on behalf of the Jews that Jesus, by His death, allowed the Scriptures to put up a defence.

And would not this death itself, for that very reason, be the nadir of complete rascality, the abject depth of a villainy which the Liturgy has summed up to a nicety under the peculiar caption of "Jewish perfidy"?

Was it not, in effect - still sticking to those "abject" comparisons which so perfectly match a God of abject humanity - a question of charging to the Comforter such expenses as would oblige Him to give satisfaction in, say, a matter of twenty centuries, at the outrageous usury of the ransom of a grief-stricken Christ, who would continue to bleed and die on the shameful tree till the cruel extortioners considered themselves indemnified?

For our Salvation is no grave-digger's joke, and when we state that it has cost the blood of a God incarnate in Jewish flesh we thereby admit it has cost everything in time and in eternity.

Well might we remember this Father of ours who is perpetually on the watch. He is a better watch than anybody, since He alone knows when the End will come.

The story of the Prodigal Son is a parable which sheds such a light upon His eternal, beatific Concern in the depths of the heavens that it has become stale and nobody understands it any longer.

Away then and tell your modern Catholics that the Father who is mentioned in Luke's narrative and who divided His SUBSTANCE between His two sons, is Jehovah, Himself - if we are allowed to call Him by His awful Name; that the elder son who, sensible and domesticated, "is always with Him", symbolises unmistakeably His Word Jesus, the patient and faithful One; and finally, that the younger son, the one who had travelled into a "far country where he had wasted his substance with prostitutes" to the very limit of being reduced to look after swine and to "fain fill his belly with the husks which the swine did eat" signifies, most assuredly, Creator-Love whose breath bloweth where it listeth, and whose divine function appears forsooth to be, after an interval of six thousand years, the feeding of Christian swine, having formerly pastured the pigs of the Synagogue.

And add into the bargain, if it tickles your fancy, that the Fatted Calf "which is killed and eaten and made merry over" to celebrate a ne'er-do-well's repentance, is still the same Christ Jesus, whose sacrifices among the "hirelings" is forever inseparable from the idea of deliverance and pardon.

Try, now, for a moment, to get those magnificent symbolisms which are familiar at the most only to a few leprous individuals, into the heart of the sentimental, wishy-washy unction of our "unco-guids", accustomed from childhood to see nothing in the Gospel but an edifying treatise in morality - and see what an outcry there will be!

XXV.

I have certainly got no ground for supposing that Christians of the Middle Ages, by and large, possessed so very transcendent intuitions of God and His Word. But, seeing that they never set eyes on the seventeenth century nor the Society of Jesus, they were simple folks, and though they might not believe with a loving spirit, they did, nevertheless, believe with a trembling heart in much the same way as it is written of devils, (1) - and it was quite enough to allow them to make a guess at a thing for their fears or their hopes to range much further than the cattle-lease horizons glimpsed at by the somnolent live-stock of contemporary piety.

"It is no laughing matter that I have loved thee," the sublime lady seer of Foligno heard one day. And that specimen of naivete tells the story of a good few hundred million hearts.

Religion was not a thing to be laughed at in those days, and the divine Life everywhere apparent was, for those simple folks the most serious thing in the world, and the most peremptory.

A certain Simon of Cyrene is spoken of in the Gospel, whom the Jews compelled to carry the Cross with Jesus when He was succumbing under the burden. Tradition teaches us that he was a poor and pitiable fellow who wanted, immediately afterwards, to become a Christian so that he could have the right to weep over himself, while he remembered the Victim whose shame he had had the glory of sharing.

Does it not seem to you, as it certainly does to me, that such an adjunct to the dying Redeemer is a manifest prefiguration of those Middle Ages, complete with their gibbets and basilicas, (2) their

(1) James 2.19. "The devils also believe and tremble."
 (2) Paul Verlaine.

gloom and bloody swords, their sobs and prayers which, over an interval of a thousand years, took on their shoulders all that they could of the enormous Cross - stepping, thus laden, into dark valleys and up painful hills, bringing up their children to the same grievous tribulation, and only laying themselves under the sod when they had bred in the children a feeling of compassion which could be readily substituted for their own.

What prodigious, indefatigable resignation!

No bread, at times, and never any rest;
 His wife, his children, soldiers and taxes,
 The creditor and liabilities
 Make a perfect picture of a poor wretch.
 He calls for death. And without delay it comes
 Asking him what it has to do.
 - "It is," says he, "to give me a hand
 To load this Wood once more."

Ah! La Fontaine is mistaken. This was no fagot which the woodcutters were praying Death to help them to put back on their shoulders.

It was the Cross of the Salvation of the world, the "one and only Hope" of the human race, which the Jews were pitilessly compelling them to carry.

Never once did they say no, although they were crushed to death with sheer fatigue, wrapped in a perpetual mist of wretchedness; and if at times they hurled themselves upon the perfidious miscreants, it was as I have said, because the latter persisted in refusing to put an end to the slow tortures of the Christ; - and that was a feeling of ineffable tenderness which nobody now understands any more.

XXVI.

It is true that the Circumcised themselves have been condemned to carry the Cross for nineteen centuries, but in quite another manner.

I mentioned above that the Jews of the Middle Ages, run to earth, on the one hand, by all the hounds of fury, or, on the other hand, by the hounds of Christian magnanimity, still possessed the one sure resource of resisting them in their wrath. I mean that terrible Sign dug up with the remains of the first Cain, by virtue of which no one could exterminate them by the sword of Wrath or the sword of Gentleness, without being punished seven times, that is to say, without being exposed to the infinite reprisals of the omnipotent Septenary whom Christians call the Holy Spirit.

Now the sign by which the Patriarch of murderers was branded and which Moses did not have permission to divulge, might quite well have been the very Sign of the Cross, if we take as a sure rule the inspiration which runs right through the sacred Texts.

This remarkable story of Cain, in which the moralising pedants of exegesis have noticed absolutely nothing, apart from the fact that it is wicked to strangle a brother, gives in a few verses with terrifying conciseness, the complete itinerary of the divine Will as it is explicitly set forth in the seventy-two supernatural books whose totality comprises the Revelation.

No more remarkable epitome exists in Scripture. It occurs just at the point where the names of Abel and Cain, confronting one another,

form a kind of symbolic monogram of the Redeemer;

Agnus Bajulans Ego Lignum
Crucis Amantem Infamiam Nobilitavi.
 Etc...etc.

We could multiply indefinitely this game of initials which furnished so much entertainment for the ancient schoolmen.

But we touch here upon the central point of the whole issue, the very axis of parables still to come, the axle-tree of Ezekiel's Wheels; and if we would take a serious view of these first two sons of Adam, who exist at the very dawn of human antagonisms, all the essential Ideas rush upon us with rousing cries.

Suffice it to note that the Lord, being unable to speak of aught save Himself, is necessarily represented at the one and the same time, by both these men; by the murderer as well as by the victim, by the latter who is without a keeper and by the former who is nobody's "keeper".

Innocent Abel, the "shepherd of the sheep", killed by his brother is obviously an image of Jesus Christ; and the fratricide Cain, cursed of God, a wanderer and fugitive upon the earth, is undoubtedly another image of Him. Thus must be the case, since by taking all things upon Himself, the Saviour of the world is simultaneously very Innocence and very Sin, according to St. Paul's statement.(1)

The Prodigal's adventure, but recently recalled, is only, at bottom, one of the innumerable versions of this first adventure of humanity.

(1) 11 Cor. 5.21. For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God.

Of course, the swine's boon companion did not kill his brother, but the latter is nevertheless sacrificed under the guise of the fatted Calf, and it is the fortunate swineherd himself who receives, at the hand of God the Father, some mysterious portents of a most peculiar solicitude...

In the vast penumbrial forest of Scriptural Comparisons there is always the same old story and the infinitely complicated woof of the same secret.

Induced by these unusual thoughts, we may say that the Jews are marked with the Cross quite as much as the Christians and quite as much as the Fratricide could ever be; but then we would be running the risk of repeating a Truism - a scandalous business, I admit, like all other Truisms.

Don't we see, now, that when the Jews succeeded in accomplishing a deed that most nearly resembles old Cain's butchery, they shaped the form of Christianity. And that is a matter that could no more be determined without them than the "Cry of the Blood of Abel" could be determined without the first murder. And just as Christians carry the Cross prominently on their breasts or on the pediments of their tabernacles, so the Jews bear its image scooped out in their ravaged souls or in the perilous dens of their synagogues.

Whatever they say and whatever they do, they cannot fail to be the intaglio of the Seal of Redemption.

That is the reason why their disgusting appearance is far more demonstrative in throwing the Image of Salvation into relief than the appearance of the very best of Christians, which can alter so

readily - by their own sweet will.

This gaping imprint, enlarged like the precipice of Chaos, by the ecumenical expansion of Catholicism, they have endeavoured to cover over and assuage with their silver, but they have only succeeded in giving this terrible cancer the appearance of a ghastly star-- making themselves for all the world like so many reflectors of lust and death.

XXVII

Shall I dare speak now of the conflict between Jesus and the Holy Spirit, so baffling to the worshipful heart? Then it must be with the meekness of a dove and the cunning of a serpent, and at the risk of being taken for a wretched fomenter of heterodox quibbles!

I have already spoken of Cain and Abel, of the Prodigal Son and his brother, as I might have spoken of the wicked Thief and the good Thief, who so curiously evoke them.

I might just as well have recalled the story of Isaac and Ishmael, of Jacob and Esau, of Moses and Pharaoh, of Saul and David and half-a-hundred others, less popular, where the mystical Rivalry between Elders as contrasted with their Junior partners, conclusively and sacramentally proclaimed on Golgotha, was foretold in prophetic fashion throughout the ages.

The brothers who were to be anathematized or who did the persecuting always represent the People of God against the Word of God. Here we have a law that is invariable and admits of no exceptions - Eternity

itself could not change it.

Now, the People of God is that deplorable Jewish people, specifically commissioned to the Breath of Sabaoth which so often made them resound like the harp-strings of ancient forests.

Israel is, therefore, invested by privilege, through being the representative of this wandering Paraclete, Who accorded it some profoundly occult protection or other and of Whom it was the abode and the furtive custodian.

For anybody not wholly destitute of the faculty of contemplation, the separation of these two seems to be absolutely out of the question, and the deeper the ecstasy the more closely welded they appear. In the end, they resemble a kind of identity, when viewed from the profound dimension of the soul.

But this is surely something very curious. For the Cross, too, represents the Holy Spirit. It is the Holy Spirit, Himself!

'Some day the heart will learn, in a way that will make it die of terror, that that Sign was, all the time, my Love, that is to say, the Holy Spirit concealed beneath an unimaginable travesty...' (1)

For the Cross is essentially a Septenary Sign.

Consequently, the Jews, so extraordinarily in harmony with the Holy Spirit, Whose Jewish voice may be perpetually heard in the undertone of our liturgies, owing to the fact that this Spirit has breathed on them like a hurricane - the Jews, be it repeated, give the Cross and nothing but the Cross to the Word of God to enable a Love that crushes to fall upon Him in its most perfect and most obdurate symbolic form.

(1) Le Désespéré p.367 Édition Soirat.

This is the Cross, mourned over by the Seven Days, to which they firmly nail that same Word of God, poor Jesus, Himself, just as the barbarous peasants nail the bird of Wisdom to the door of their house.

They nail him stoutly upon the Tree so that He may not get down again without their permission.

Seven blows with the hammer for the right Hand, Seven for the left Hand and Seven more for the frightful pointed shard which transfixes the two Feet of the Good Shepherd; - so that the significant number of twenty and one may be obtained, which was the number of years of Zedechiah, who made a mockery of the Name magnificent, (1) and who "humbled not himself before the face of Jeremiah," when he mounted Jerusalem's sullied throne, while a grief-stricken populace was on the point of being led into captivity.

But this is not all..The Cross is shameful, and it makes the Word of God just as shameful.

The Cross is sheer madness; and the Word of God, by the will of a hostile people, becomes the Spouse of its insanity.

The Cross is weak, it is motionless, capable only of inflicting torture, and the omnipotent WORD incarnate of the "God of Gods", prostrate in its arms, becomes weak with it, incapable of any movement and the executioner of those most dear to it, who have to be "conformed" to His punishment...

Ah! if only, one day, they might be separated! But the Jews alone have the power to abrogate the law of torments which they have

(1) 11 Chron. 36. 11,12.

enacted, without knowing what they were doing, by some astounding impulse from the Lower Depths.

The glory of this Word which they have misunderstood and the advent of the Love so often predicted by their prophets, cannot be brought together until that day when Jesus ceases to hang from the Cross, and that depends exclusively on the inscrutable Will which gave birth to their malice.

Still, it was a million times necessary to nail them to one another beforehand in this cruel manner, so that in this way the impossible betrothal covenant of the two Testaments might be miraculously demonstrated in future days.

A few flashes swifter than light - we can reasonably hope for no more. For Revelation is rather a wan firmament obscured by mountains of darkening cloud, whence now and again there leaps forth, to plunge back again immediately, the rapid gleam of the thunder-storm's lightning-flash.

As to the Sun, he has never been able to get over his excitement of the first Good Friday, for we are well aware that the "jots and the tittles" allow of no pardon; they, too, are implacable, and are no more penetrable than the most fantastic allegories or orisons of this Holy Writ, Three or Four times sealed, in spite of all the soothing explanations which so many Christians have fancied about them.

I know quite well how absurd, monstrous and blasphemous it must appear to suppose that some antagonism lies in the very bosom of the Trinity; but it is impossible to take stock of the Jews' unutterable destiny in any other way; and when we speak lovingly about God, all human words look like blinded lions seeking for a stream in the desert.

The rivalry, of course, springs from our human point of view.

Any imaginable violation of what we fittingly call Reason must be conceded when speaking of a God who suffers, and when we consider what we are required to believe to be a mere wretched dog of a Christian, it is no great effort to suppose, in addition, "a kind of divine impotency provisionally contrived between Mercy and Justice, in view of some ineffable recuperation of a Substance which had been wasted by Love."(1)

Since we are taught, from childhood upwards, that we are created in the likeness of God, is it so very difficult to make the simple presumption, as we have done before, that there must have been, in the very Essence of inscrutable Reality, something corresponding to ourselves, but without sin, and that the tragic synopsis of human afflictions is only a murky reflection of the ineffable conflagrations of Uncreated Light?

If there is one outstanding truth in the world, verified by most forthright experience, it is the sheer impossibility of

(1) Le Désespéré p.51

matching and harmoniously harnessing together Love with Wisdom. The incompatible steeds yoked to your hearse devour one another perpetually, my precious 'identical' humanity!... And if anybody can get to the bottom of it all, he is welcome to do so; but, truth to tell, that is exactly where God's secret lies hidden.

Now, this is precisely the point where from the deeps of memory's subconscious I recollect one of Ernest Hello's sublime allegories regarding Glory and Justice, which, of course, simply reduplicate the two eternal antagonists we have just mentioned.

This remarkable parable which in all likelihood was never written, and which the author probably did not dare publish, I am divulging now with a clear conscience, more or less as he told himself a few years before he died.

The Judge is coming at his own time - no one knows when. At his approach the dead come to life, mountains tremble, oceans dry up, streams vanish away, metals melt and fuse together, plants and animals disappear; stars mount, in their haste, on top of one another from the depths of the heavens. Human terror is beyond anything that can be imagined.

"I was an hungered, and ye gave me no meat: I was thirsty and ye gave me no drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me not in, naked and ye clothed me not, sick and in prison and ye visited me not..."(1)

That is the whole judgment - terrifying in its infallibility: terrifying too, in the hopelessness of appealing against it.

(1) Matt.25 42,43

At last a man presents himself, a horrible creature, black with blasphemies and iniquities.

He is the one and only person with no vestige of fear about him.

Yet, he it is, and no one else, who was cursed with the maledictions of heaven, cursed with the maledictions of earth, cursed with the maledictions of hell's abyss. It is on his account that malediction climbed down to the very centre of the globe with the express purpose of enkindling a fury that had to lie dormant until the Judgment Day.

This is the man who was cursed by the cries of the Poor Man with more terrible intensity than erupting volcanoes: and crows haunting the water-falls have affirmed to the pebbles in river-beds that he was genuinely cursed by every breath that passed over the blossoming fields.

He was cursed by the white foam of waves frothed up by the rising storm, by the serenity of the blue sky, by Gentleness and Splendour; and cursed, in sum, by smoke arising from hearths of the humble poor at supper-time.

And, as though all that amounted to nothing at all, he was cursed in his infamous heart, cursed by HIM who is needy, eternally needy, to whom never once had he stretched forth a helping hand.

Probably Judas may have been his name, but the Seraphim who are greatest of all Angels, were unable to pronounce his name.

He seems to be walking in a column of bronze. Yet nothing could possibly save him. Neither the supplications of Mary nor the

crossed arms of all the Martyrs, nor the outspread pinions of the Cherubim or the Thrones. He is thoroughly damned, and what a damnation!

"I am appealing!" says he.

He is appealing!... At this unheard- of word, the stars are extinguished, the mountains descend under the seas, the very Face of the Judge is obscured. Universes are lit up by the Fiery Cross alone.

- "What is there, then, in my Verdict, to which you are appealing?" is the question put to this condemned wretch by our Lord Jesus Christ.

"I am appealing from THY JUSTICE TO THY GLORY."

XXIX

Of all prejudices or inherited opinions which the public take for granted, there is nothing more firmly riveted in the Christian soul than the trite commonplace which would seek to handle the well-known Jewish avarice, coupled with the universally mercantile instinct of the wandering people, by a strict decree to punish the lot of them for having made merchandise out of their own God.

There is no question that, apart from the auction of our Lord, where this instinct ran riot altogether, the Jews were fixed in their infidelity just at that mathematical point where their vocation as depositaries of the prophecies was thus shamefully brought to a head; in much the same way as all men, according to

Theology, are inflexibly bound to the particular circumstance of the sin concerning which they remain impenitent when death steps in to surprise them in the very act.

I have never, at any time, said any other thing than this, and I believe I have even pushed ajar, to some extent, that pallid gateway of the Irrevocable, upon places otherwise impossibly obscure.

But the "Worm" of their damnation kept gnawing inwardly for a long time before it made its appearance. For the essence of things does not deviate, and the most atrocious perverts have no power to change their own nature for something else; and it would be contrary to God's inflexible deployment if the Jews had not always been, substantially, what they obviously are to-day; yes, even from their very origin, - right from the time when they were in the loins of Abraham, the procreator of them all.

The magnitude of that Name, blessed above all names, and the stupendous sanctity of the Patriarch can do nothing about this particular question at all.

But hold! What am I saying? Do not those factors plainly offer, to the horror of imagination, some appreciable measure of the precipitous fall incurred by his innumerable children who never cease tumbling down the corridors of human history, colliding the while with all manner of echoing walls?

In that sublime tabernacle which is named for all eternity the "Bosom of Abraham", there must have existed from the very start, in an unmentionably embryonic condition, that horrible

tare of malediction and loathing which the cadaverous posterity of the "Called" of Jehovah cultivates exclusively with so great care.

In other words, he who was named the "Friend of God for all time", and who had never "his like in glory" must have borne within him - under a species of light - the whole kennel of usury and broker-dealing, by which his distant lineage, cursed by the human race, had to earn its livelihood in future days.

The brilliant negociation about the amnesty of Sodom in the 18th chapter of Genesis is a stupifying example of this.

Now, please let me quote here a paraphrase of the passage - admittedly somewhat out of the ordinary - so that I can, at long last, get the whole thing off my mind.

I promised to respect the anonymity of the author, who is, I believe (like a man stricken with the plague) the last enthusiast of an erudite exegesis, peculiar to ancient days. To-day he would appear like an intransigent speculator of Absolute values, who never consents for a single moment to be displaced from his own particular angle: namely that Abraham is positively the Father of God's Son by Mary and that it is in the name of the Virgin Mother that he is obliged to speak to Him.

It is understood, of course, that this page is offered like those raised characters which serve for the education of young people who are blind.

Readers who can feel their way lucidly will find most certainly in this passage a remarkable proof of the Jewishness of the patriarch, who haggles an inch at a time with his Lord who is brimful

with righteous indignation, like a Yiddish-speaking Jew of Algeria or Warsaw haggling over a rotten piece of rag.

Here, then, we have a specimen of merciful, worshipful Jewishness, right at the beginning of things, when the very name "Jews" did not as yet exist and when shepherds' kids were able to exult on hills filled with perfumes and incense-burners, which no abomination of God's People had so far profaned!

XXX

THE FIRST JEWISH SPECULATION

"The cry of Sodom and Gomorrah has multiplied", said the Lord, "and their sin is exceedingly grievous." (1)

This saying is addressed confidentially to Abraham, immediately after the promise of a Son in whom all the nations of the earth are to be blest. A Promise, forsooth, which made old Sarah laugh "behind the tent-door", as it made the centenarian, Abraham, laugh a few days beforehand.

Laughter is very rare in Scripture. Abraham and Sarah, those two ancestors of the sorrowful Mary, Mother of Tears, are imputed to have introduced it, and this mysterious circumstance is of considerable importance in that the name given to the first stem of Redemption's genealogical tree, at the very moment when this tree comes up out of the ground, is nothing else than Isaac, and the word Isaac means Laughter.

(1) See Gen. 18.20.

It is while the air is still vibrating with this surprising laughter that God informs His Patriarch of the cry of the guilty towns, and thus begins the sublime story of the Fifty Just Men.

The infinite beauty of this passage commands so great a respect and so tremulous an admiration that it is scarcely possible to hope avoiding the suggestion of blasphemy as we try to appraise it.

We must remember that we are at the very start of things and that the elect People, that is to say, the Church militant, has just been called.

Abraham, the Father raised up from the masses, the unique Man, of whom Noah was but the simulacrum, and on the Bosom of whom the living souls of the just must one day shelter their glory: Abraham, we repeat, offers the hospitality of his tent to the Three divine Persons who appeared to him in the valley of Mamre "in the heat of the day." (1)

In his anxiety to serve them, Mary's grandsire multiplies symbols and figures, and, after a series of acts reminiscent of the Sacrifice of the Mass, he finally stands upright UNDER THE TREE quite close to them.

(1) Gen. 18. 1,2. - The text speaks of three men, tres viri stantes (three men standing), and Abraham speaks to them continually in the singular. Must we not conclude from this circumstance and from the extraordinary marks of respect which he accords them, that the patriarch felt himself to be in the presence of the Lord Himself? A great number of Fathers have believed so. The Council of Sirmich pronounced anathema against those who used to say that Abraham had not seen the Son, and the Church adopted this sentiment, since she says in her worship, Tres vidit et Unum adoravit. (He saw three and he worshipped One.) S. Augustine says in sermon 70, de tempore (Concerning Time), In eo quod tres vidit, Trinitatis mysterium intellexit. Quod autem unum adoravit, in tribus personis Unum Deum esse cognovit. (From the fact that he saw three, he understood the mystery of the Trinity: insofar, however, as he worshipped one, he recognised that One God existed in three persons.)

It is the hour for the renewing of the Promise. The Lord is to return in the time stipulated, and Sarah the tent-dweller is to have a Son. Moses, David, Solomon and the seventeen Prophets of the law of watching are to have nothing else to do, henceforth, save to re-echo this beatific announcement concerning the birth of Abraham's genuine Child, who is to be the Saviour of the Gentiles.

After such a gift, the same Lord is no longer "able" to hide anything from the one whom He loves, for infinite Affection, so to speak, empties itself out completely, and thus He lets him know His terrible design of destroying Sodom and Gommorah, whose outcry has risen up to Him.

The brand of Scriptural metonymy used here to express the unutterable enormity of the sin which God is about to punish, leaves a singular impression on the mind. It appears that crime has a voice just as innocence has, and that Sodom's abomination cries out like the blood of Abel.

"I will descend," adds the awesome Speaker, "and I will see if their works correspond to this cry which ascends to me: I want to know whether that is the case or whether it is not."

These last words have such a fatherly ring about them that they are a natural inducement to the audacious prayer which is about to follow. What the Lord wants especially to see is the humility of His servant, a humility which will resound all the more clearly because his supplications are to be more urgent, and apparently more headstrong. That is why He does descend, and it is just this

this prodigy of His Grace that He wants personally to verify.

In order to sense the sublimity of this scene, one can do no better than ponder over what Jesus expresses so profoundly when He speaks of "Abraham's Bosom".(1) The Patriarch bears Jerusalem within himself, and he prays with the whole weight of the universal Benediction which he has just received - projecting in this way that infinite parabola of prophetic ecstasies which takes its rise from himself, and which, after having bestridden all the journeyings of Jacob, is to complete itself in splendour in the last verse of the "Magnificat".

Sodom is the town of Secrecy, and Gommorah is the town of Rebellion.(2) They appear to represent two unknown forms of the attack upon Love, the first form of the attack being peculiarly aggravating. Yet this is the very town for which Abraham intercedes in a rather special way, as though the salvation of rebels depended on the forgiveness accorded to secret sinners and idolaters.

Since Mary is only to speak six times in the Bible, the one entrusted with the task of prefiguring the Intercession of this Mother of the living, will only ask grace for the guilty SIX times, and he will ask it not so that the crime itself should be spared, but so that "the just might not be involved in the punishment of the wicked."

- "If there are to be found FIFTY just men in the city, in the real City which is to be Your Mother's Heart, will you not forgive?

Fifty cubits comprised the entire breadth of the Ark in which the

(1) Luke 16. 22,23.

(2) Such is the meaning in Hebrew of these two names.

human race was saved.(1) No, really, it is not possible that You should do such a thing: that You should destroy the just with the wicked and that the innocent should be treated like the guilty: that is not worthy of You, Who are the Judge of the whole earth. You could not, in any wise, exercise such a judgment."(2)

- "For the sake of these, I will forgive," declares the Lord.

Abraham muses within himself. He considers that he is only "dust and ashes", but after all since he has made a start, why should he not carry on and speak further to his Master?

"If five were lacking," he hazards, "of the fifty just men, will You destroy the whole town because there are only forty-five just men?"

In His turn, the Lord reflects that, being omnipotent, He is able to destroy everything; but that He would require forty-five perfectly straight and magnificent pillars to support the dome of Solomon's mystic palace,(3) and He promises not to destroy the town if He finds forty-five just men there.

Abraham speaks a third time.

"But if there are FORTY just men, what will You do? Ah, yes, Lord, what will You do? The Deluge lasted forty days and as many nights, after which You shut off the fountains of the deep; then Your people is predestined to lament forty years in the wilderness before reaching the land of its desire; Ezekiel, too, the seer of Your glory and the herald of Your Evangelists, is to announce in a

- (1) Genesis 6.15.
- (2) Genesis 18.25.
- (3) 1 Kings 7.3.

few centuries, Your assumption of Judah's iniquity during the forty days of Your fast.(1) What will You do with Sodom if You discover there as many men as the number of times Your incommunicable divine Unity is contained in the symbolic number of Penance?"

- "In the event of finding forty, I agree to hold my hand," says the Lord.

- "Do not be angry, I pray You," replies the Patriarch, "if I speak again. What is to happen if there are only THIRTY of them? Do You remember that the Ark, which carried Reconciliation in its bosom,(2) was only thirty cubits in height? It was Yourself Who gave this measure to honest Noah, and this is to be exactly the wretched number of silver pieces which is to serve one day to purchase You for the Sacrifice, when the time comes for the world to sustain a thorough impoverishment of holocausts capable of appeasing You."

"I will do nothing," the Lord straightway replies, "if I find here the number of thirty."

To insist any more is obviously a foolhardy procedure. A man of great discretion and of moderate faith would be content with that. Yet Abraham hopes for something more. He thinks, like David, that it is not possible for God to divest Himself of His mercy or to forget to show pity or to shut out His clemency in His Wrath.(3) So, then, this man of all beginnings makes up his mind.

(1) Ezekiel 4.6.

(2) Ecclesiasticus 44.17.

(3) Psalm 77. 9,10.

- "Since I have made such a good start, I will speak yet again to my Lord. If there were no more than TWENTY of them. If it so happens that there were only twenty truly faithful sons in that Mother's heart, that Mother whom I am one day to give You; if the court of Your tabernacle were to be supported only by twenty pillars of brass, mounted with carved silver,(1) would Your Immaculate Dwellingplace crumble to pieces for that?...Nor is that all, O Lord. You know that You will be sold on another occasion to the Midianites, that is to say, to righteous individuals,(2) in the person of my great-grandson Joseph, and, in this circumstance You Are to be bought only for twenty pieces of silver, for sold You are to be, at any price, O God!"

"Having due regard for the number twenty, I will not kill," says the Lord.

The Scriptures call Abraham God's "well-beloved"... One prayer still weighs upon his heart. He must speak it, and it is all the more difficult because it is exactly like his other pleas. But after all, it is from him that there is to issue one day the Woman whose womb and breasts are to be called blessed, and in virtue of a consideration like that, he can dare everything.

- "'I implore You," says he, "not to be angry if I speak yet once again; only once. What will Your decision be if You find TEN just men in this place?... Is there not to come a day when ten men, indeed ten men "of all the languages of the Gentiles", hastening together to seek the Face of God, are to hold fast to the skirt of him who is a Jew, and are to say to him: "We will go with thee,

(1) Exodus 27.10.

(2) Midian signified judgment and implies a litigious meaning.

because God is thy companion."(1) Are not these ten necessary for Your plans quite as much as the Ten Commandments of the Law, which You are to write on Sinai's dreadful mount?"

In the luminous dawn of his prophetic petition the Patriarch doubtless catches a glimpse of those strangers of the end of ends.. But if, forsooth, they were to be encountered in Sodom, city of mystery!... well, the Lord would be compelled to grant His forgiveness!

And forgive He certainly did, undertaking not to destroy the town if those ten men were to be found there.

Here concludes the dialogue between the Omnipotent Avenger and the Omnipotent Suppliant.(2) The Lord, having been conquered SIX times, goes away and stops speaking with Abraham, as if He feared that He would be conquered a seventh time and be no longer able to find "peace" thereafter in His own deliverances of Justice.

(1) Zechariah 8.23

(2) Omnipotentia supplex. This magnificent name as applied to the Virgin was revealed by Saint Bernard.

Such are the Jews, the authentic Jews, in every point similar to that Nathaniel perceived under the emblematic fig-tree, who, in spite of all that may be said, provoked the remark from Him Who is called the Truth: "Behold an Israelite, in very truth, IN WHOM THERE IS NO GUILE."(1)

Such it pleased God to make them at their very origin, and He was not afraid to take upon Himself their own peculiar image when in His love, He appeared in the flesh as the Son of Abraham, liable to the suffering which mortality entails.

For far too long have I kept myself in check through fear of giving a few fiery sacristans high blood-pressure, by daring to say that our Lord Jesus Christ had to shoulder that disgrace, too, like all the rest - with an infinitely proportioned exactitude.

Without repeating all over again the great Holocaust which was obviously the boldest "speculation" that an Israelite has ever conceived, it would not be very difficult to find in the outward form of the infinitely loving and sacred words of the Son of God, some family link with the eternal Judaic thought with which the Gentile world bubbles over.

Is not the untrustworthy Steward, for example, praised exactly for his fraud, and is not Jesus' inexplicable conclusion the plain precept "to make for yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness?"(2)

This is, in sum, the recommendation spoken of by tradition,

(1) John 1.47

(2) Luke 16.9.

when, in ancient times, the six thousand Hebrews were instructed to cheat and defraud, as they departed from Egypt laden with the borrowed treasures they knew they would never be able to restore. In that exploit they were helped by the same Lord who protected them in their flight.(1)

A perpetual identity runs through the profound meaning of these sacred texts. It is true that their literal meaning might scandalise those who are tempted to go wrong, but their sublime interpretation by means of symbols will for ever remain inaccessible to all the spiritually perverse.

We feel like falling down a precipice when we think that the word "Egypt" - "Mizraim" in Hebrew - means Anguish or Tribulation: that the first Joseph, sold by his brethren, so clearly figurative of the Word made flesh, and obeyed by all the kingdom which was delivered by him from famine "was named in the Egyptian language 'Saviour of the world'";(2) and that in consequence, Jesus Himself, the "consummator", or the hypostatic focus on Whom the prophecies and symbols all concentrate, having come exclusively from His Father to reign over universal Suffering, was, after all, when He made His escape by the scandal of His cruel punishment, only carrying away with Him the treasures of hereditary spiritual distress and the economies of tribulation which He had borrowed, never to give them back, from all those who placed their confidence in Him.

After the disappearance of this adorable Bankrupt of despair, the Jews who had just crucified in His Person "without knowing what

(1) Exodus 12.35,36

(2) Genesis 41,45. - And Pharaoh called Joseph's name Zaphnath-paaneah.

they did", the very conscience of the Primogeniture, continued, in the meantime the instinct of the Race, which the miraculous Incarnation had blended together in so singularly potent a manner - though, to be sure, so vainly, as far as the Jews themselves were concerned - with the divine Will... and there remained no longer in their hands anything but Silver coinage, that poor massacred Victim which was to take the place of their Messiah.

XXXII

But this instinct for petty trading and craftiness, stripped of its mysterious adjuncts was at that time no more than an ugly bias towards the excessively low depths of avarice and covetousness.

The cowardly "supplantation" of the poor giant Esau before whom Jacob, mighty against God alone, never ceased to tremble, and the universal plundering of the Egyptians, have become rather cheap performances inept to prefigure anything but the conclusive Punishment - whose form, as yet unknown, will be such that anyone becoming acquainted with it by faith in the Holy Spirit, would know to a certainty the unsurmisable Secret of Redemption's denouement.

Præcipitously headlong in their fall, the Israelites rolled down as far as they could, right to the lowest rung of the Ladder of the Giants of shame.

Of the Sovereign appanage that once was theirs, they kept only the Shadow of its pristine power, and that was Silver. This ill-

fated metal changed to ordure in the clutch of their vulture-claws, which they forced to work in their service for the brutalising of the whole world.

In their fear that this unique servant might escape them, they chained it savagely, and they chained themselves to it, into the bargain, by hideous fetters which were fastened seven times round their hearts. Thus they employed their fierce despotism to make themselves its slaves.

And the soul of the people, in the long run, became fouled with the plague of them.

Since they had waited more than two thousand years for an opportunity to crucify the Word of God, they could very well wait nineteen times a hundred years until a colossal explosion of Disobedience had transformed the worshippers of this suffering Word into swine, so that at least the "prodigal Son's" herd might not be lacking to this Israel which had wasted its substance.

In very truth, Israel has become this shepherd to perfection.

The Christian nations, turned renegade and invaded by the white leprosy of Israel's dirty silver, surrendered to it; and mercenary potentates, humbly descending from their ancient thrones, wallowed in the mire at its feet, becoming vile as itself.

Deuteronomy's literal prophecy was actually fulfilled, in an abysmal depth of mockery and sacrilege: "And thou shalt lend unto many nations, but they shall not reign over thee."(1)

This rule exercised by silver, which makes Jesus Christ's

(1) Deut. 15.6. Faenerabis gentibus multis, et ipse a nullo accipies mutuum. Dominaberis nationibus plurimis et tui nemo dominabitur.

white vicar frown with indignation and which appears to me- I believe I have said it often - like an unfathomable secret, is accepted by the Catholic lineage of the sublimely disinterested of the Middle Ages in such a manner that those who fondly dream of the humiliation of the Jews, are compelled to crave it in the name of their own filth, swamped, as that is, by the more overwhelming sewer of these verminous strangers.

True, the sole lovers of Poverty, those honest wretches of voluntary penance - if any of them are still to be found - might perhaps have reason to detest them for having oxidized with silver the ancient, exceedingly fine gold of the living tabernacles of the Holy Spirit; for having shamefully united their mean little soul with the magnanimous soul of nations devoid of treachery, which the saints had formed "as bees form the combs of their honey"; and finally, and above all, for having - in scorn of eternal Norms and by means of a frightful expansion of Envy - suggested, among Christian peoples, that the fratricidal commandments of the Wicked Poor Man should be substituted for the Commandments of the Lord.

For, undoubtedly, they have diabolically lowered the human level in this last century, when their aptitude for debasing has broken out to such an extraordinary extent.

It is through them that modern conceptions of the End of life has been brought into being, which so influence the intemperate enthusiasm for Big Business.

It is through them that this algebra of baseness called Credit has, in no uncertain manner, taken the place of venerable Honour, in respect for which standard chivalrous souls were content to tackle all things.

And, as if this strange people, condemned, whatever may happen, to be always in some respect God's People, could do nothing without letting some of its eternal history appear forthwith, the living and merciful WORD of Christians, Who had lately been an object for a good stroke of business, was sacrificed all over again in all those shady business-deals, in the stringency of a SCRIPTURE which is mercilessly relentless.

Thus did an infinitely decisive victory determine a débâcle which was universal in its scope.

The precipice thus being opened, the pure springs of greatness and idealism fell into it with a mighty sob. Reason was exfoliated like a vertebrate stricken by necrosis, and the Jewish plague, having at last arrived in the darksome valley of goitres to that confluent point where the Masonic typhus sprang forward to meet it, a malignant species of idiocy broke out upon the inhabitants of the light, who were thus delivered over to the most abject of deaths.

Fortunately, venomous beasts never rid themselves of their venom which, at times, causes their own destruction, and it was quite essential for Israel to become inoculated with the idiocy which it passed on to the universe.

It is wholly possible in fact for this thoroughly decrepit weakness, of which the stupid apron of the Lodges is the most expressive emblem and the most alarming symptom, to have been taken over by Israel in the insatiableness of its insensate wrath, just like a suicide undergoing a necessary immolation...

But, - mighty God! - What a pitiful consolation indeed, for societies in deliquescence, stuck pell-mell along with their conqueror in the putrifying dissolutions of a decrepitude for which there is no remedy!

XXXIII

Silence!

Comes a voice from below.

An exiled voice, extremely distant, enfeebled, almost dead, which appears to grow louder as it ascends from the depths.

The First Person is He who speaks.

The Second Person is He to whom one speaks.

The Third Person is HE OF WHOM ONE SPEAKS

The Third Person is Myself, Israel, praevalens Deo, the son of Isaac, the son of Abraham, the Person who generates and blesses the twelve Lion-cubs established on the steps of the ivory Throne for the glory of the great King and for the perpetual overshadowing of the nations.

Absent from all places, I am the Stranger in all habitable abodes, the Squanderer of Substance, and my tents are pitched on

hills so gloomy that even reptiles from the tombs have made laws to blot out the very tracks from my wilderness

No veil is like unto my Veil, and no man knows me because no one except the Son of Mary, has been able to fathom the infinitely equivocal enigma of my damnation.

At the very age when I used to look robust and glorious, in those ancient times prior to Golgotha so full of marvellous things, my own children never knew me and often they refused to have anything to do with me, for assuredly my yoke has got nothing soothing about it, and my burden is excessively heavy.

I am so accustomed to bearing the terrifying "Repent ye!" of a Jehovah who "grieved for having made men and animals", (1) and anyone can see that I bear it in much the same manner as Jesus bore the sins of the world!

That is why I have the dust of a vast number of centuries upon me.

But for all that, I shall speak with a Patriarch's indelible authority, invested a hundred times over with the Almighty's "Thus saith the Lord!"

I have no great love for those children of mine belonging to Judah and Benjamin for having crucified the Son of God. In very truth they are the posterity of their two ancestors, begotten of me and compared long since by myself to two ferocious beasts.

But they have undergone their punishment and I did not refuse to be their spouse and the titular of their excessive reprobation.

(1) Genesis 6.7.

Remembering that I had treacherously defrauded my brother Esau, it was quite in accordance with justice that I should assume, even down to the very last generation of my lineage, complicity in a betrayal which was to prepare the Salvation of the human race, while deliberately depriving myself of any domination over the empires.

Of course, these wretched children never knew that they were thus bringing about the translation of images and prophecies, and that by their nameless and measureless crime there was being inaugurated the bloody Reign of the Second Person of their Godhead. This was the Reign which succeeded the First, which had drawn them out of the grievous land of Egypt.

There is no mistake that hereafter the advent of the Third Reign is bound to come, and the IMPRINT of it is upon my Face. By it, all the veils will be rent in the temples where men foregather, and all the flocks will be mingled together in One luminous Unity.

Nevertheless, these things will not happen before we have seen "the abomination of desolation in the Holy Place", that is to say, before those Christians who so persistently reprove my unfaithful progeny shall have brought to a head, with even greater ferocity, the very atrocities with which they accuse that progeny.

Hearken, you Christians, to the words of Israel, the confidential agent of God's Spirit.

He who is knows no other thing save to repeat Himself, and the Lord of Lords is always athirst for suffering.

When the Promised One Who is called the Comforter comes to take possession of His inheritance, necessity will demand that Christ should leave you, since He declares that that Paraclete could not come if He did not depart beforehand.(1)

For He will appear to forsake you, one day, just as His Father had forsaken Jerusalem, and forsaken even Himself; and you will be delivered as rigorously as the Jews "to an everlasting reproach and a perpetual shame which shall not be forgotten."(2)

Do you not see that we are henceforth the boon companions of the same festival of baseness, and that we travel in fellowship under the taskmaster's cruel lash?

All the time they have instructed you, those doctors of yours have not understood that the two prostitute sisters, spoken of by Ezekiel, have survived both Jerusalem and Samaria, and that they live always in the perpetuity of symbol, their names to-day being the Synagogue and the Church.

"Because thou hast walked in the way of thy sister", saith the Lord God to the younger, "therefore will I give her cup into thy hand.

"Thou shalt drink of thy sister's cup deep and large; thou shalt be laughed to scorn and had in derision: it containeth much.

"Thou shalt be filled with drunkenness and sorrow, with the cup of astonishment and desolation, with the cup of thy elder sister, the faithless guardian who is polluted in the impurities of the nations.

(1) John 16.7

(2) Jeremiah 23.40.

"Thou shalt even drink it and suck it out and thou shalt break the shreds thereof, and pluck off thine own breasts...

"And you will both be delivered up to the tumult and to rapine, stoned by all the people and despatched with the edge of the sword." (1)

That Redeemer who is powerless to awaken you will be withdrawn from you at a distance of a stone's-throw, (2) and your souls will be forsaken of Him, as were the tabernacles of His altars on that first Good Friday's mortifying and mournful day.

In this abandonment by One who is your strength and your hope, the universe, reeking with mortal fright will contemplate the unrevealable Torment of the Holy Spirit when He is persecuted by the very members of Jesus Christ.

The Passion will begin all over again, no longer in the midst of a fierce and detested people, but at the cross-roads and at the very umbilicus of all peoples, and the wise will learn that God has not shut up His fountains, but that the Gospel of Blood which they believed to be the end of revelations was, in its turn, like an Old Testament charged with intimating the Comforter of Fire.

This unheard-of Visitor, which I have waited for these four thousand years, will have no friends and His wretchedness will make beggars look like emperors.

He will be the very dung-heap on which the Idumean beggar scratches his sores, and anyone bending over Him is bound to see the very depth of suffering and wretchedness.

(1) Ezekiel 23. 31-47

(2) Luke 22.41.

At His approach the sun will be turned into darkness and the moon into blood; proud rivers will recede like run-away horses: walls of palaces and walls of prisons will sweat in mortal anguish.

Putrefying corpses will be covered with strong perfumes bought from bold sea-farers, so that they may be preserved from the plague He brings with Him, and poisoners of the poor and child-assassins, in the sheer hope of getting out of his reach, will call upon the mountains to fall upon them.

After having exterminated all pity, disgust will kill even anger itself, and this Outlaw of all outlaws will be silently condemned by magistrates of irreproachable gentleness.

Jesus was only an object of hatred at the hands of the Jews - but what hatred! Christians, however, will treat the Paraclete to a superabundance of what is beyond all hatred.

He is to such an extent the Enemy, and to such an extent identical with THAT LUCIFER who was named the Prince of Darkness, that it is almost impossible - even were it in beatific ecstasy - to separate the two...

Let anyone who is able to understand, take the trouble to

understand. (1)

The Mother of Christ has been spoken of as the Spouse of this Unknown, who is an object of dread to the Church, and it is assuredly for this reason that the Most Prudent Virgin is invoked under the names of MORNING STAR and SPIRITUAL VESSEL.

It will be necessary, nevertheless, in view of manipulating the "unbridling" of the Abyss, for this Church of Martyrs and Confessors, on their knees at Mary's feet, to renew against the Creator Spirit - albeit with a pacific ferocity - the unbridling of the Synagogue.

But the heart of man would dry up at the thought of this burning solstice of the world's summer, where the very Essence of Fire will crackle in the Seven braziers of conquering Love; and where the barren Fig-tree, for so long cursed, for so long sprinkled with ordure, will be looked upon to give, at long last, the only Fruit of love and comfort capable of holding in check the utter loathing of a long-tried God.

(1) These last lines have had the honour of stirring the emotions of a Jesuit, who claimed that such assertions were destructive of dogma. "Is it a metaphorical assimilation or an absolute affirmation?" Such was his Popilius' circle. How can we get it to penetrate a brain full of formulae that the difficulty ceases altogether and that the circle is broken as soon as this passage is compared, for example, with the liturgical prayer of Holy Saturday: Lucifer, INQUAM, qui nescit occasum? (Lucifer, AS THE SAYING GOES, who is ignorant of his downfall.) Christians - few and far between, I am afraid, - who still use their reason, would notice that there is no question here, or in the case mentioned in our text, of metaphor any more than of strict affirmation, in the sense of revealed doctrine, but simply of stating the Mystery, the Presence of Mystery, to the scandal of fools or theological pedants who declare that everything is crystal clear.

It will then be quite a simple matter for Him to descend - this crucified Redeemer - since the Cross of His shame is precisely the image and infinite likeness of the wandering Liberator whom He called nineteen centuries ago - and doubtless, too, it will be understood that I am myself this Cross, from the head to the feet!..

For the SALVATION OF THE WORLD IS NAILED UPON ME, ISRAEL, and it is from Me that He must "come down".

IN EXCELSO

Ezekiel 37. 1-14. (Written in Latin from the **Vulgate**, but here rendered from the authorised version of the Bible.)

1. The hand of the Lord was upon me, and carried me out in the Spirit of the Lord, and set me down in the midst of the valley which was full of bones.
2. And caused me to pass by them round about: and, behold, there were very many in the open valley; and, lo, they were very dry.
3. And he said unto me, Son of man, can these bones live? And I answered, O Lord God, Thou knowest.
4. Again he said unto me, Prophecy upon these bones, and say unto them, O ye dry bones, hear the word of the Lord.
5. Thus saith the Lord God unto these bones; Behold, I will cause breath to enter into you, and ye shall live:
6. And I will lay sinews upon you, and will bring up flesh upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and ye shall live; and ye shall know that I am the Lord.
7. So I prophesied as I was commanded: and as I prophesied, there was a noise, and behold a shaking, and the bones came together, bone to his bone.

8. And when I beheld, lo, the sinews and the flesh came up upon them, and the skin covered them above: but there was no breath in them.
9. Then said he unto me, Prophecy unto the wind, prophecy, son of man, and say to the wind, Thus saith the Lord God: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain that they may live.
10. So I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood up upon their feet, an exceeding great army.
11. Then he said unto me, Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel; behold, they say, Our bones are dried, and our hope is lost: we are cut off for our parts.
12. Therefore prophecy, and say unto them, Thus saith the Lord God; Behold, O my people, I will open your graves, and cause you to come up out of your graves, and bring you into the land of Israel.
13. And ye shall know that I am the Lord, when I have opened your graves, O my people, and brought you up out of your graves,
14. And shall put my spirit in you, and ye shall live, and I shall place you in your own land; then shall ye know that I the Lord have spoken it, and performed it, saith the Lord.

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